

## FRED GOES HUNTING

The second time that Fred visited us in Forks, Bella and I took him to the Olympic Forest to give him a taste of game hunting, something he was curious about. Renesmee came along to show off her hunting skills to our new friend and Jacob came to keep her company. Renesmee decided that we had to explain about Jacob so that Fred would not be scared.

"Jacob is a wolf," Renesmee said to Fred once we'd gotten a ways into the forest.

Fred nodded his head, not knowing what to say to that. If he were still human, he might have blushed to be singled out by a small child. He was distinctly uncomfortable, but Renesmee was not. We had told her that Fred was special, like Jacob.

"Are you a wolf too?" she inquired. She wasn't ready to touch Fred to talk, so she chose to speak aloud to him.

"Uh...no."

"How are you special then?" Renesmee wanted to know.

"I'm not really special," Fred answered.

"Fred can do some interesting tricks," I told her.

"Show me a trick! Show me a trick!" Renesmee said, getting excited and springing like a pogo stick five feet into the air. Fred copied her, bouncing into the air and back down, until both were pogo-ing about together...boing, boing, boing.

Renesmee started to giggle and Fred abruptly stopped jumping, his expression exactly as it had been before. Fred was not a smiler. In fact, Fred was not at all expressive. The only time I'd seen him become animated was when he had spoken about stealing computer resources from the University's computer lab. Renesmee thought Fred's deadpan

expression was hilarious and she bent over holding her stomach with laughter.

“Fred’s funny,” she said to her mother, who wasn’t close enough to touch at that moment. Bella and I were both smiling, but Jacob was not. He was looking a bit irritated as he watched Renesmee play with Fred.

“Neeessssie,” Jake coaxed in the enticing child-like voice he used to get our daughter’s attention. “Bet I can catch the first buck. Race me?”

“I want Fred to come with us,” Renesmee replied, looking eagerly at Fred to see if he would agree. The muscles around Jacob’s mouth tightened and his thoughts took on the shape of daggers aimed at Fred’s head.

Bella glanced discreetly at me and then cut in. “Nessie, why don’t we let Daddy take Fred by himself for his first time, so he doesn’t get distracted. I’ll come with you and Jake.” Wise woman. I quickly nodded my assent and kissed Bella on the cheek.

Renesmee ran and leaped into her mother’s arms, slamming her palm into Bella’s face. That was a bad habit we still hadn’t addressed.

**But I want Fred,** Renesmee whined silently. Jacob guessed what she was saying. With an audible huff he turned at an angle to us as if he were preparing to take off on his own.

“Later,” Bella said firmly to Renesmee. “Wait, Jake, we’re coming with you,” Bella called, taking off in a trot toward Jacob and grabbing his arm as she went by. Renesmee wiggled her legs to be set down and all three of them darted into the forest.

“Renesmee likes you,” I said to Fred who nodded once with no change of expression. Okay, then. “Let’s just run,” I suggested. “Keep your nose alert for the scent of game. Mostly we find deer and elk in these woods, but we could get lucky and find a cougar. We’re not likely to run into bear this close to home.”

*I started running and Fred followed on my heels. When I caught the scent of deer, I slowed, raised my nose as a signal, and nodded toward the east. Fred nodded to acknowledge that he smelled them. He also wrinkled his nose and I chuckled.*

*“Yes, most of us react that way the first time. Often we continue doing so too,” I added with a smile. “Would you like to try first?”*

*“Sure,” he said. Fred dropped into a hunting crouch and began creeping sideways toward the scent. I let him lead the way and he behaved as we all do instinctively—he scented, stalked, and then lunged, catching the two young bucks off guard and quickly taking down the one nearest to him. The other one got a jump on me, but I chased after him and caught up easily enough. When I finished drinking, I dropped the carcass, and turned around to see how Fred was doing.*

*My eyes widened in surprise at the spectacle I saw behind me. Fred was holding the buck upright on its hind legs and had his head tucked into the deer’s inner front leg. I watched in fascination as he drank slowly without enthusiasm, before giving up and releasing the animal.*

*The deer fell to the ground with its legs still kicking. Fred hadn’t drunk enough blood to render it unconscious and the animal was terrified. Not good. I dashed over, held the buck quiet and whispered, “Is that all you want?”*

*Fred nodded. He had spit out his last mouthful of blood and was trying to wipe the dribblings off his chin with his sleeve. I bit firmly into the buck’s neck and let its already weakened heart pump the rest of its blood down my throat until the muscle faltered and expired. I dropped the buck and stood.*

*“I kinda made a mess of that,” Fred commented.*

*“You didn’t like it,” I observed. Fred shook his head.*

*“It’s an acquired taste,” I said, smiling at him.*

"I dunno about that," Fred said expressionlessly. "Do you always bite their necks like that?"

"Yes," I said, surprised that he would ask such a question. "Unless I'm sharing."

"I bet everybody else does too, huh? I know I'm weird."

"Whatever gets the job done is fine, I suppose. I am curious, though, what made you bite under its leg?"

"Well..." Fred seemed hesitant to say. I looked at him and waited politely for him to continue. "That's how I drink humans. So I just did the same thing I always do."

"I see," I said slowly. "That's one way to do it, I guess. Did Riley ever take you hunting?"

"No, he just set us loose in groups of four or so and I hated those guys, so I always ran off on my own. I couldn't stand the screaming and the taunting, and the general mayhem that Raoul and his friends always seemed to enjoy. I never stuck around long enough to watch, but I could hear them no matter how far away I got."

Those were the most words I'd heard Fred string together at one time, I thought. His distress was written on his face.

"And you've always hunted alone since then?"

"Yeah. Like I said, I haven't seen any other vampires since I ran away from the coven."

"So you've never seen anybody else hunt?"

"Nah." He paused. "But no, I'm not retarded or anything. I've seen a lot of vampire movies." Fred didn't smile at that comment either, but I thought I saw a slight twinkle in his eye.

*“You developed your own style on purpose?” I asked, feeling my mouth twitch a little at the corners.*

*“Yes. I’ve never been a big people person. I didn’t like getting that close to their faces, so I started drinking from the top of the brachial artery. Raoul used to call me ‘Armpit Fred,’ but I never knew whether that was because he saw me drink or because of the smell I used to aim at him whenever he came near me.” This time Fred did smile and I chuckled along with him. He had an idiosyncratic way of looking at things.*

*“I hated that guy. I’m glad he’s dead,” Fred added, losing the smile. “I wish Bree had gotten out too.” I nodded, remembering the child we had tried to save from the Volturi without success. If there ever was a next time, with any luck we wouldn’t be hamstrung like that again.*

*“She was your friend,” I observed.*

*“Yes.” That was all Fred said on the point, but his thoughts told me that he had become quite fond of Bree and had hoped that she might grow to appreciate him too—at least until Diego entered the picture. Now both Diego and Bree were dead. We stood there silently for a moment.*

*Finally, I said, “Would you like to look for some cougar? Most of us find that the taste of predator blood is more to our liking.”*

*“Is that right? Well, it couldn’t be much worse,” Fred said, meaning to be humorous, but his face again remained completely stoic. That was something interesting I was learning about Fred. The emotions he felt when he spoke almost never matched the expression on his face. I could only assume that he didn’t have brothers or sisters and that he had spent most of his life alone. He didn’t seem to have learned to make his intentions and his facial expressions congruent. That’s also characteristic of autistic humans, I recalled. Perhaps Fred had been mildly autistic before he was changed. He was obviously intelligent.*

*“Let’s go see what else we can find for you. I’d hate for you to give up on game after tasting only deer. You might prefer elk, or cougar, or fox. My brother Emmett prefers bear.”*

*“It’s worth a try,” Fred responded.*

*“By the way,” I told him. “I wouldn’t say the words ‘Armpit Fred’ to my daughter. I have a feeling you would never shake the name. Words like ‘underarm,’ ‘butt,’ and ‘crotch,’ are her new favorite taboos. She thinks they’re hysterically funny.”*

*I smiled at Fred, but he didn’t reply and his expression didn’t change. Probably, he couldn’t relate to children all that well, but it was clear to me that Renesmee was going to relate to him if she had anything to say about it.*

*It will be very interesting to see how Jacob responds to that... I’m looking forward to it.*

*Edward*

