

19. SURPRISES

The seconds were endless, each one stretching into the future, elongating as they passed by. I'd heard Jacob's discouraging thoughts as he plodded out the door and down the stairs before I blocked his mind from my perception. I wouldn't let his despair overtake me!

I pumped Bella's heart frenetically, trying to push the sluggish venom through her bloodstream. As soon as the fire took hold of her body, part by part, it wouldn't let go until the job was finished. That was a certainty. The big question in my mind, though, was whether Bella was still living inside that ravaged shell lying on the surgery table. Her body had gone still...so still.

When does a soul vacate its body? I'd read somewhere that if a human body is weighed just before death and again just after, its weight drops by twenty-one grams, about three-quarters of an ounce. Is such the weight of the soul? What was the weight of Bella's soul? Riding on my shoulders as it now was, it felt like twenty-one tons. I would carry it for as long as necessary, though, if it meant she would come back to me.

Did Bella know I was here pumping her heart, expanding her lungs, trying to keep her human flesh alive until it could be transformed into something dead and yet, paradoxically, never to die?

There it was!! A heartbeat? Or not. I stopped compressions to listen for it. Yes!! Bella's heart was reviving!! The beat was slow and irregular, but it was there. The venom was working! Frightened, hopeful, impatient, I stood beside Bella in that bloody abattoir, clasping and unclasping my hands, waiting for assurance that the process would work again as it had countless times before. Much to my relief, it seemed to be. Bella's heart was picking up speed, the beating strengthened, and I knew that my work was done. Whatever happened now was out of my hands and in those of a higher agency. *Please, God, let her still be in there...*

Rosalie's shrill cry broke the silence, "Ew! Get away from us!" I listened for a moment and saw through her eyes that Jacob had dropped to his knees beside the sofa. He was gazing at Renesmee's face and she was gazing back.

"I mean it! Back off, dog!"

Reluctantly, and still keeping his eyes glued to Renesmee, Jacob backed up on his knees, stopping about three feet away.

"Farther! Get away! Get away!" Rosalie hissed, but Jacob was transfixed. I could feel a change coming over Jacob's mind. From despair and fury, his thoughts and emotions were swinging in another direction altogether.

Oh! Oh, my gawd! My daughter?! Nah...can't be. I shrugged the thought aside and turned back to Bella. Her legs were still flopped awkwardly to the side, a result of her

broken spine. Pain tugged at my heart. There was no way to know if it would heal, if the venom could repair something so severely damaged. Did the broken parts of her body need to be re-placed into their correct positions? If so, how close was close enough? I hadn't observed Esme's change that carefully, or examined her injuries, which were the most like Bella's, so I didn't know.

I also didn't know how much pain Bella could feel. The burning had started, so I would expect her to be writhing and screaming. I'd given her a hefty dose of morphine, though, trying to speed the numbness before doing the C-section. Quite possibly, it was the morphine that ultimately had stopped her heart.

Regardless, I didn't want to take any chances that I would cause her more pain, so I didn't touch any of her injuries above the waist. I knew for certain that she could feel nothing below it. I reached under Bella's hips and applied slight traction to her spine, hoping that by doing so, any severely displaced vertebrae would realign themselves and perhaps promote a better repair. The bones cracked and moved much as they would have in a chiropractor's office. I ran my fingers down her spine to feel if any bones or fragments were protruding. The line was smooth.

Then, partly for Bella's modesty, partly for promoting the repair, but mostly out of reverence, I took my wife's legs, one at a time, and stretched them long and straight. Having them lie in a more natural position made the sickening damage of her spine less evident. The gaping surgical wound on her lower belly looked much as it had, implying that the venom hadn't moved below the spinal break. What if the spinal injury couldn't be bridged? Would the change continue anyway?

Please, God, let her live! And if I could ask for yet another favor beyond that, please give her back the use of her legs!

It was time to attend to her belly. The birth was as yet incomplete. From studying C-sections, I knew that the surgeon had to deliver the placenta and stitch the uterus back together. Bella also had the stone-like membrane still inside of her body. It seemed unlikely that the fire could burn that away. The safest thing to do would be to remove everything created during gestation and sew her up. And I'd better do it fast in case her spine healed and she regained sensation below her waist.

How many men throughout history had done such as this to the bodies of their wives? I couldn't be the first. Sometimes, necessity requires us to perform actions we'd have thought impossible before being compelled to do them. That was the case here. I avoided dwelling on the reality of the work and just finished as quickly as I could. Though it was probably unnecessary, I used surgical thread to sew both incisions closed. I wanted to make Bella whole again. When I'd finished, I stood up, dropped my arms to my sides, and froze in place, unable to move.

I don't know how long I stood there in complete stillness before the slamming of the kitchen door brought me around. I heard the stage whisper of Rosalie's irritated response. "Shhh! You'll wake the baby!"

So Renesmee sleeps! Interesting. If it weren't for the overwhelming anxiety I was enduring—waiting to know whether Bella was “in there,” worried that she was suffering, and not knowing if the transformation would work—I would have liked to be in the living room with Rosalie, looking at the new life Bella and I had created, cataloging her nature, listening to her mind. I wanted to know her.

Emmett was back from his hunting trip. He'd been determined to find a bear or two, so had traveled farther and stayed out longer than Alice and Jasper. I was glad he was home. The family felt more stable with him around. He had a tremendous calming influence, not just on Rosalie, but on all of us. It was partly due to his physical size and strength—a good, heavy ballast to hold the ship upright—but it was also his easygoing nature and sense of humor. It was hard for anyone to get too worked up when Emmett was around. I listened in on Rosalie's thoughts for a moment to check on the baby. It was startling. She didn't sound like Rosalie at all!

...sweet little baby, so beautiful, so precious...such tiny fingers, tiny toes...soft and perfect...look at that hair!...Carlisle had better get back soon...we're running out of blood...she is a thirsty little thing...

That was it, on and on, her mind consumed with Renesmee. Not a thought for herself.

“Emmett, come here! Come see Renesmee!” Rosalie whispered impatiently to her mate as he entered from the kitchen. Emmett's eyes widened in surprise. Seeing his wife with an infant child in her arms was a complete shock to his system. Then excitement took over.

“Is that...Bella and Edward's...baby?” Through Rosalie's eyes, I saw his eyebrows lift to his hairline and his smile widen to its limits.

“Yes, isn't she beautiful?”

“Very. Hey Jacob,” Emmett appended.

“Don't you have somewhere to be?” Rosalie hissed.

“Lemme hold her,” Jacob replied. “I want to hold Renesmee.”

“Are you crazy? No! Get away from us!”

“Come on, Rosalie, share with the rest of us. I'd like to hold her too,” Emmett said. Rosalie gave Emmett a disapproving look.

“Are you sure you can handle it? She has human blood.”

“Yeah, sure, no problem. I'm an uncle! Uncle Emmett! Sounds pretty good! Hey wait, how's Bella, is she all right?”

“I don't know. Edward's with her,” Rosalie replied.

“She died,” Jacob said flatly. “Her heart stopped during the birth. Edward thought he could save her, but I have my doubts.”

At that moment, I knew the truth for certain. Werewolf magic had caught up with Jacob. There was absolutely no way that the Jacob I knew ever could have uttered those words about his Bella, without ranting and raving and probably starting a fight. He didn't

seem indifferent now, just sad in a more controlled, more rational way. His thoughts didn't linger on Bella, but immediately switched back to her child. I heard Emmett's confusion. This wasn't the Jacob any of us knew.

"I'm gonna check on Edward," he tossed out as he ran up the stairs.

"Edward, you okay, Bro?"

"In here, Em."

Emmett's large body filled Carlisle's doorway. A look of stunned horror distorted his face before he quickly covered his mouth and nose with his hands. I looked around then, reawakening to my surroundings. I'd been so lost in my mind that I'd become insensible to the bloody scene in which I stood.

Emmett took two steps backward. "Edward, is Bella...?"

"Her heart is beating."

"Jacob said she...died." Emmett disappeared from the doorway and moved ten feet down the hallway. "Sorry, Bro, I'm gonna talk to you from out here." Not that that would help him much.

I wondered if this room would ever be clear of the scent of blood. I looked down to see that my shoes were soaked in blood up to the laces. My trousers were stained dark to the ankles, and the rest of me was covered in drips and splatters of my wife's blood. I covered my face with my bloody hands and felt the horror, the terror, and the desolation wash over me. In my frenzy to save Bella's life, I'd locked my feelings away. Now, when there was nothing more that I could do but wait and hope, they hit me with triple force.

My knees gave out and I landed on the floor with a thud. "Edward, are you all right? Maybe you should come out of there," Emmett cajoled.

"I can't leave her," I heard myself croak.

"Alice, where are you?" Emmett called.

"I'm back here," Alice answered softly from her room, where she and Jasper had been holed up for the last several days.

"Can't you come? Edward needs help."

There was a short pause. "Um...yes...okay."

"Edward?" Alice spoke softly from the doorway.

"Mmm?" I answered, keeping my face hidden.

"Edward, how is Bella doing?"

"Her heart is beating. She is changing," I muttered.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Give her to me! She wants to see me!" We all popped our heads up at Jacob's voice from downstairs.

"Emmett, would you mind refereeing the drama in the living room?" I asked, glad to give him a job that he would be relieved to take. Though he wanted to stay here for me, hanging out in a blood-drenched room was beyond his capability.

What's with Rosalie and Jacob? Alice asked.

I dragged myself to my feet and whispered a reply. “From what I gather, it would seem that Jacob has imprinted on Renesmee.” Saying the words out loud made it more real—and more troubling.

No!

“I think so. I can hardly believe it myself. I can’t say I’m happy about it, though it seems to be a great relief to Jacob.”

That’s just weird!

“You’re telling me,” I said, moving to Bella’s side, stroking her beautiful, still face. “Alice, is she going to be okay?” Alice approached slowly.

Well...Edward...honestly...ummm...I don’t know. I can’t see her now.

“But the baby’s out! Why can’t you see her?” I asked, alarmed.

I don’t know, I don’t know... Alice moaned silently. Then I noticed her great distress.

“What is it, Alice? You’re frightening me!”

I’m sorry, Edward. Right now, I’m just seeing a lot of “nothing.” Almost like looking at the wolves, but not. There are blank spots everywhere.

“Oh!” The images in Alice’s mind were disturbing. Glimpses of Bella, the human Bella, flashed in and out, but mostly the vision was white space and fuzz. “What does it mean?”

“I don’t know!” she cried sharply, then paused, thinking it over. *That’s why I’ve been staying away! I can’t help and I didn’t want to scare you.*

“But you’re not still having the headaches?”

No, they stopped when Rosalie took the baby...Renesmee...away.

“Good. Have you seen her?”

“No, not yet. I’ve been too w...worried about Bella,” she said, her voice breaking. I reached for Alice’s hand and realized that I wasn’t alone. We stood there together, gazing at Bella’s face, all signs of her earlier torment gone.

“She seems peaceful at least,” Alice commented.

“I gave her enough morphine to down an elephant. I hope she’s feeling no pain.”

“That’s all you can do. Now we wait.”

“Yes.”

We stood there a few more minutes, hand in hand, thinking of our mutual love for this woman...our brave, foolhardy wife and sister.

Eventually, Alice broke the silence. “She’s going to make it, Edward—she’s got to—and it’s all because of you.”

“I appreciate that, but getting Rosalie under control was vital. She would have drained Bella. It’s rather surprising that she lasted as long as she did, really. She hasn’t been hunting for...hmm...as long as me.”

And she’s taking care of the baby!

“Yes, just my thought. Perhaps you could put a bug in Emmett’s ear about getting her out for a hunt. Check with the wolves to make sure it’s clear. If what I think happened did happen, then we should be able to trust Jacob with the baby, unless you want to take a turn.”

She’s safe for now, anyway. Emmett and Jacob together can control Rosalie, if it comes to that. But I’ll go talk to Emmett in a while. First, I’m going to help you clean up this room. It’s awful!

“You’re right. Emmett couldn’t even come in.”

Jasper can’t even come out of our bedroom!

Alice flitted away to collect the necessary supplies...scrub brushes, buckets, bleach, ammonia, trash bags, furniture polish, paper towels, and lots of rags.

“This used to be a nice office,” she commented wryly.

It took about forty-five minutes to stuff all the dirty plastic and linens into garbage bags, get the medical instruments clean and soaking in bleach, scrub the floor, and wipe everything down. Fortunately, the room had a wooden floor and not a white carpet. We’d have to tear out the living room carpet and replace the couch. The scent of blood was hard to obliterate, and with the newborn Bella living here, it was especially important to do our best.

Bella the Newborn. I’d have to get used to the idea. Life would be easier, though I regretted that we’d not been able to save her human life. The detached placenta ended that dream. Bella must have realized that herself, with all the blood loss and the severe beating she took from the inside. Broken ribs were the least of the worries. Ruptured organs, punctured lungs...things had gotten out-of-hand fast.

“Do you want some help with Bella?” Alice asked when we’d cleaned Carlisle’s office/surgery and eliminated all remnants of blood to the best of our abilities. We’d have to get some of that protein-eating enzyme and wash it into the cracks between the floorboards where blood had collected—or replace the floor. Esme could decide.

“I’d like to wash her myself, but you can pick out some clothes and dress her.”

Oh, goody. You know I’ve just assembled an entire wardrobe for her.

“Yes, I know,” I smiled, having seen images of Bella’s new closet in Alice’s mind. “Bella’s not a big shopper. I’m sure she’ll appreciate that. Would you mind bringing some clean clothes for me? I don’t dare walk through the house like this.”

Happy to. Are you okay here, then?

“Yes. I’d like some privacy with Bella.”

Okay, I’ll get your clothes and then check on the situation, Alice pointed down with her index finger and turned to leave.

“See if you can get Rose to hunt,” I whispered.

I will.

“Alice?”

“Yes, Edward?”

“Thank you, Alice.”

“You’re welcome, Edward.” We both smiled at this habitual exchange. She shut the door behind her.

I took one more look at my beloved Bella and kissed her forehead, then went to wash my hands and get some supplies. I’d give Bella her daily bath. When I saw myself in the bathroom mirror, I realized that I looked at least as ghoulish as Bella did. I removed all of my clothes, including my shoes, and stuffed them into a garbage bag. Not only were the clothes ruined, but I never wanted to see any of them again.

In general, our smooth, hard bodies don’t collect dirt as it has nothing to stick to and we don’t perspire or shed skin cells. A light dusting now and then, a good brushing to shake the dust out of the hair, and perhaps a spray down once in a while—if, for example, you are covered in blood—is all we ever need. I stepped into the shower, suddenly anxious to have all the blood and gore off of me. I wanted no more reminders of this horrific day.

Wrapped in a towel, I walked back to Carlisle’s office, which was once again an office, but with lots of shiny stainless steel filling the space. I saw that Alice had not only brought some fresh clothes for me, but also had thought to bring a basin and pitcher from the kitchen, a bathing sponge, and a short stack of towels. The basin was filled with soapy, warm water.

God bless Alice! Apparently, she could still see *my* future—short term, anyway—although perhaps this collection of supplies was a result of her detail-oriented nature, rather than her vision. I suddenly wondered if my future was also blank when Alice looked. She hadn’t mentioned it, but it seemed likely that it would be, given how completely tied to Bella I was. My future was entirely dependent on what happened to my wife.

I started with Bella’s forehead and worked my way down. Bella’s eyelids were dotted with blood and there were two lines of dried blood that had run from her mouth into her ears. Splatters of it were all around. Fortunately, I had good eyes and a good nose for finding it all. I was in no hurry.

Even with the wound sewn up, my wife’s abdomen looked grotesque, not human. Her flesh was stretched and distorted—now gone slack—and was still black and blue from top to bottom and from side to side. It pained me to remember her suffering, everything she had endured to save our daughter. How I loved her for her heroism, though I fervently wished that she had not been pushed to such a dire, destructive end!

After washing the front of her, I rolled her onto one side with a pillow under her head and cleaned her back. After I was sure I’d soaped, sponged, and rinsed every part of

her, I dried her off with several towels, then emptied the last basin of water into the bathtub and refilled the pitcher with warm water.

Returning, I gently pulled Bella's limp body to the end of the table till her mahogany hair hung over the end and poured water over it. I shampooed her long locks, and then used two full pitchers to rinse out the soap. When I was finished, I towel-dried her hair and covered her body with a clean, white sheet.

Performing these intimate acts for my beloved Bella, though she was by all appearances insensible to it, gave me great comfort. And much to my surprise, it brought back a very dim and distant memory of my human mother washing her deceased mother's body. I had never recalled this image before, and I could retrieve no further details, except that I had emptied the basin and carried in fresh pitchers of water. The event must have made a huge impression on me as a boy; otherwise, there was no way it would have worked its way to the surface after all this time. Very few human memories did.

My grandmother had been laid out in our home in the tradition of the time before funeral homes took over the task and removed all reality from death. It would seem that I was carrying on an old tradition. But this wasn't death, I had to remind myself. This was *rebirth*.

I hadn't been paying attention to what was happening downstairs, as wrapped up in my task as I'd been, but I noticed now that Rosalie and Emmett's mental voices were gone. Jacob was still there, utterly absorbed in Renesmee. Rose had given the baby to Alice before going with Emmett to hunt.

"Let me hold her," Jacob demanded.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, look! She wants me!" I saw Renesmee from Alice's vantage point. The baby was leaning toward Jacob with her arms outstretched. When she touched his neck, he said, "Are you hungry, little Nessie?"

"Okay, she's all yours," Alice said, handing her over. "Jasper?" she called out. I heard Jasper speed downstairs.

"You called?" he answered formally.

"I'm going to grab some blood for her and check on Edward. I want you two to keep an eye on each other and the baby." Jasper nodded in assent, a broad smile lighting up his face as he took his first look at Renesmee.

"Come on in, Alice," I said softly when I heard her outside the door.

Oh, Edward, she looks beautiful!

"She always looks beautiful, Alice," I chided. "She can be dressed any time, though maybe we should wait until the surgical wound heals more completely."

Fine. I'll come back in a few hours and see how she's progressing.

My anxiety level suddenly rose. "Do you think she's going to be okay, Alice? Can you see anything? It seems like something should be happening. She hasn't moved at all! It's been hours!"

I'm sorry, Edward. I believe so; I hope so; but I just don't know. She looked down at her shoes and then bent to the mini-fridge. "Renesmee is hungry. I came for another pint. Only four left."

"Carlisle should be back with more in just a few hours. I wish he were here now."
Can't we call him?

"No, Rosalie's unfortunate...um...fall smashed the one mobile phone we had left. *Emmett accidentally squeezed the third one too hard a couple of weeks ago. We could go pick up another one, but no stores will be open for hours yet. Carlisle might be back by then. Or one of us could drive to town and call from there.*

"Oh, it's not really necessary. I'm just anxious to talk to him, have him check on Bella, make sure things are okay. None of us was ever this still or this quiet, except maybe Carlisle himself."

He knows that you had to deliver the baby and why, right?

"Yes, I think Rosalie got that much out before..."

He must be rushing back now, don't you think? He must be frantic!

"Perhaps. Or else he knows that we're still likely to need the blood and there's nothing he can do to help Bella now, anyway."

Wait, wait. Let me check... Oh! Something had surprised Alice. Then I saw in her mind that Carlisle and Esme were no more than five minutes away. I'd stopped listening for them in my distraction.

"Oh, good," I sighed.

I'm sure he'll be right up when he gets here. I'd better deliver this to the little one.

"Yes." I heard the confusion in the baby's mind and felt her thirst. Jacob was holding her against his body as she repeatedly kicked him in the stomach with her heels...*hard*. She was getting angry. Jacob didn't try to contain Renesmee's legs as I would have, just began baby-talking to her, trying to calm her down. Now there was something I never thought I'd hear!

"Ouch!" he exclaimed.

Hmmm....

I took Bella's hand and brought it to my lips. It was no longer human-warm, but it was still warmer than me. I saw that her fingernails were changing color. When she was being suffocated by the blood in her throat, her fingernails had turned blue. When Jacob performed CPR and artificial respiration, her fingernails returned to their normal light pink color. Now the pink was fading to pearl white—one of the first signs of the change.

Just then, I heard Carlisle rush through the kitchen door with Esme on his heels. They raced into the living room and both stopped suddenly when they saw the tableau assembled there. I heard two sharp gasps one after the other.

"Oh! The baby!" Esme cried.

"Where's Edward? How's Bella?" Carlisle inquired, though he was already up the stairs and outside the office door before anyone had a chance to answer him.

Alice delivered the answer to Esme instead.

“Bella’s changing, but she’s completely silent and unmoving. Edward’s worried that something is wrong.”

“You can’t see?”

“Unfortunately, no,” Alice replied sourly. “This is Renesmee, by the way.”

“She is beautiful! She doesn’t look like a newborn baby, does she?”

“Edward!” Carlisle knocked on the door. “Can I come in? Are you all right?” I opened the door and he rushed to Bella’s side. “A good, strong heartbeat! It looks like you’ve done very, very well!”

I could not reply. I was paralyzed—by relief this time. Carlisle turned to me, his eyebrows raised. When he saw my expression, he grasped my shoulders, looked closely at my face and then pulled me into his arms. My head fell limply to his shoulder and my arms gripped him with a strength that would have crushed a human.

“I’m sorry, Son. I’m so sorry that you had to cope with this on your own.” I could neither move nor speak, only cling, so Carlisle kept talking. “From what I see here and what I saw downstairs, though, it looks like you’ve done a remarkable job. You have a *beautiful* new daughter—she’s a girl, right?—and Bella’s well on her way.”

I lifted my head and whispered, “She hasn’t moved a muscle or made one sound. It’s been hours.”

“You gave her the morphine, didn’t you? That should have knocked her out for a good long time, I should think.”

“Yes,” I replied, releasing my grip on him.

“Tell me what happened,” Carlisle said as he turned to check Bella’s pulse. “You rescued her heart?”

I began to relate the distressing story to him in hushed tones, reliving the torment all over again.

“Shall I check her injuries?”

“Yes, especially her spine. I don’t know if it can heal. Also, her surgical wound. Will that heal okay?”

Carlisle reached beneath Bella’s body and felt the spinal vertebrae as I had.

“There seems to be no displacement.”

“I realigned the vertebrae. The spinal cord injury seemed to be around T9 or T10.”

Ah, yes. I can feel it. Must be a broken vertebra pressing against the spine.

“The spine isn’t torn all the way through?”

I can’t be sure, but that is actually a rare occurrence. Usually, injuries occur from pressure on the spine or loss of blood flow to it.

“When Rosalie made the first cut...”

Rosalie?

“Yes. Bella was choking and I was trying to clear her airway. When Rosalie cut into her, buckets of blood poured out.” The memory made my hands shake.

Internal hemorrhaging, of course. I can smell the remnants.

“We might have to replace the floor.”

So Rosalie delivered the baby?

“Uh, no. There was just *so much* blood. Rosalie lost her focus and Jacob had to boot her out of the room.”

Jacob?

I nodded. “Jacob kept Bella’s heart and lungs going, while I delivered the baby and injected the venom into her heart.”

We owe him a great deal for that. Had Bella’s heart completely stopped?

I drew a sharp breath, remembering the scene, and nodded.

And the venom restarted it?

“Yes. It was like a jolt from a defibrillator, but it didn’t start beating on its own right away. Then I bit into all her major arteries as well.”

With any luck, that will speed the process.

“So you think she’s going to be fine?”

I don’t see any reason why she shouldn’t be. Hand me that towel there.

I pulled a towel from the stack Alice had left and handed it to him. Carlisle shook the folds from the towel and laid it over Bella’s upper body before lowering the sheet down to her surgical wound.

It looks good, Edward! You removed the placenta and the membrane?

I nodded.

Under these conditions, I would worry about infection in a human mother, but the venom will burn all that out, so I see no reason why Bella won’t be perfect.

“I hope you’re right.”

A knock on the door interrupted our conversation.

“Can I come in? How is Bella?” Esme entered carrying the baby, who had laid her head on Esme’s shoulder.

“Yes, please come in,” I responded. “How does it feel to be a grandmother?”

At the sound of my voice, Renesmee raised her head and looked at me intently, then leaned toward me eagerly with her arms outstretched. I reached for her and pulled her into my chest. She was hot, hotter than a human, and beneath the stench of wolf, she smelled wonderful... absolutely wonderful. She had a touch of Bella’s human scent, but it was watered down by vampire scent. She didn’t smell like prey to me.

“Hello, little Renesmee...,” I said softly.

Joy welled up in her at the sound of my voice and my heart melted. I stroked her soft curls and looked into her alert eyes. They were the eyes of her mother, beautiful, wide, and deep, that milk chocolate color. I knew that she recognized me when she grabbed my nose. I laughed in spite of myself.

“That’s right, little one. That’s me. I’m your father.”

“For the record, I’m much too young to be a grandmother,” Esme interjected.

I smiled at her. "You certainly are."

"I'd like to examine Renesmee," Carlisle said. "She's been here how long now?"

"Twelve hours, give or take. I'd just as soon stay with Bella. Can we do it here?"

"Certainly." Carlisle dug around in the rolling supply cabinet and selected some instruments. I wandered toward Bella. When Renesmee saw her lying there, she reached toward her mother.

"Yes, Renesmee, that's your mother, Bella." I leaned down so that Renesmee could look at her and touch her face. "She can't hold you right now because she is sleeping," I told her, looking into her eyes. She seemed to accept that and leaned back into my chest. She put her hand against my neck and looked at my eyes. I saw in her mind another image of Bella, the first one Renesmee had seen. Bella's face splattered with blood, deep wrinkles of pain gouging her forehead, her hair matted and bloody.

"Yes, that's her," I said, nodding. Renesmee had recognized her mother and put the two images together. Amazing! Esme joined us, gazing at Bella's expressionless face, and stroked her forehead.

Renesmee grasped my nose again. It seemed that our first touch was how she would remember me. She had reached for me as her lifeline from the womb and that moment had bonded us forever.

She touched my lips curiously and I grabbed her little fingers between them in a pretend bite. Her face opened into a wide smile, showing two rows of perfect, miniature teeth. Then she grabbed my nose again. It was as if she was reminding me of our previous connection. She seemed to understand a great deal of what was going on around her and she had memories from the moment of birth. She was astonishing!

I began humming a tune for her and her hands became still. She laid her palm on my face and stared into my eyes with a look of wonder. A collage of moving color swept through my mind and I realized that I was reading hers. The colors must be her first impressions of her environment. How remarkable to see inside a child's mind!

Carlisle pulled up a chair for me and a facing one for himself.

"Carlisle, Renesmee understands a great deal more than one would expect from a newborn. Even in the womb, she understood some things, like how to avoid hurting Bella. She has memories of both her mother and myself from the moment of her birth!"

Carlisle stared and raised his eyebrows. "You can see this in her mind?"

I nodded.

"Renesmee," I said. "This is my father and your grandfather, Carlisle. He would like to examine you."

Carlisle began explaining to her what he wanted to do and she watched his face with fascination. He showed her the stethoscope around his neck, put the earpieces in his ears and held the diaphragm to his own chest before placing it on hers. She stared at him for a moment, and then reached to pull an earpiece from his right ear. He removed both and placed them in her ears. Her eyes widened at the "thu-thump, thu-thump, thu-thump"

sound. When Carlisle removed the stethoscope from her ears, she twisted around and placed her palm on my cheek. The sound of her heartbeat became louder and once again, I saw the flowing colors in her mind. When she pulled her hand away, the images stopped suddenly.

“Hmm, that’s interesting...”

“What’s that, Edward?”

“I’m not sure.”

“Renesmee’s heartbeat is quite strong and much faster than I would have expected. Like a bird’s.”

“I suppose there’s no way to know whether that is normal for her.” When I spoke, Renesmee put her hand against my mouth and I kissed it. She laughed.

Carlisle held out an otoscope and let the baby touch it before using it to look in her ears and her nose. Renesmee twisted around to me again, placing her hand on my throat. Immediately, I saw an image of Carlisle’s face, one eye squinted shut, the other looking into the scope. I tried to clear my head of the image, but couldn’t. Carlisle reached forward and tickled Renesmee on the stomach with one finger and she removed her hand and turned to face him again. The image was gone.

“Umm...Carlisle...something unusual is happening here, I think.” He looked at me in surprise, his eyebrows lifted.

“What is it, Son?”

“Renesmee,” I said, turning her sideways on my knee so she could see my face more easily. “Can you show Grandpa Carlisle what you showed me?” She placed her palm against my cheek.

“Yes,” I said directing her hand toward Carlisle. With a question in his eye, he leaned forward so that she could touch his face. She looked at me again, and then reached to touch Carlisle’s cheek.

“What do you see?” I asked quietly.

My father’s eyes grew wide with surprise and his mouth dropped open. He stared at me.

“Did you see something?” I asked. He nodded slowly.

Renesmee withdrew her hand and turned again to me. I smiled and said “That’s right, Renesmee. You showed Grandpa.” She made a laughing sound and reached for my face with both hands.

Did she do that? I saw a close-up image of my own face squinting into the otoscope.

“That’s what I saw too, but I couldn’t tell if I was getting it directly from her mind or whether she controlled it. It stopped when she removed her hand from my face. You too?”

Carlisle nodded slowly.

“Renesmee, can you show Grandma Esme?” Renesmee reached a hand toward Esme who had been watching in fascination.

“Come in close,” I encouraged. Carlisle was watching Esme’s face with curiosity and anticipation. Esme knelt down beside us and Renesmee reached to touch her face. I watched as Esme’s eyes grew wide. Renesmee withdrew her hand and Esme looked at us in wonder.

“Did she do that?”

“We think so. What did you see?” I asked her.

“First, I saw a close image of your face, Edward, with the baby’s fingers in your mouth and then I saw an image of Carlisle looking through an instrument.”

“My word, Edward! In an infant!” my father exclaimed.

I smiled at Esme. “We think Renesmee can put pictures in another’s head through touch. She was showing you what had just happened to her.”

“Baby Renesmee,” Esme cooed, “you are a marvel!” Renesmee smiled widely at her.

“It would seem to be a variation on your gift, Edward,” Carlisle said. “You pull thoughts out of others’ minds and Renesmee puts pictures into them.” We all stared at one another in silent amazement and disbelief.

“I wonder if it works on everyone or just close relatives or just vampires or what,” Esme mused.

“Jacob’s still here. Perhaps you could take her down to him and see what he says, since he’s not related,” suggested Carlisle. “We can finish the exam later.”

“Would you like to go with Grandma Esme now and see Jacob and Alice?” I asked Renesmee. Esme held out her arms and Renesmee looked at me. “Yes, Grandma Esme.” Renesmee turned back to Esme and reached out to be taken from me. “I’ll see you later,” I said to her, kissing her tiny hand. She smiled at me, showing her teeth.

“We’re going to have to work on that title, Edward. Something a little less ancient-sounding perhaps? How about ‘Nana’?”

“‘Nana’ it is,” I said, grinning.

Esme turned toward me, her face beaming, and said, “Isn’t this wonderful, Edward? A baby in the family! Imagine!”

Yes, it was unprecedented, as far as I knew. Not only did we have a new half-vampire, half-human child, but she carried with her some absolutely stunning surprises. I couldn’t wait for Bella to awaken so I could share it all with her. Renesmee was wonderful and beautiful and miraculous, but without Bella there, having Renesmee felt incomplete, somehow, and a little unreal.

Renesmee was half Bella. I needed her with me.