

GROWING UP NESSIE

“It wasn’t like that, Nessie. I swear,” Jacob said to my daughter.

“But Jake, it’s icky! And very disturbing to me. How can I ever forget that you were in love with my mother?” Nessie demanded.

“You know, I was a lot younger then and I wanted her to be my first sweetheart. But she never saw me that way. She was in love with your dad from when she first met him.”

“But she loved you too.”

“She still does. You know that.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Fortunately for all of us, your mom picked your dad and now we have each other.”

“I don’t know. Did you, like, kiss and stuff?” Nessie asked, not really wanting to know. Through my daughter’s eyes, I saw Jacob look down at his feet, then take a deep breath and look up again.

“Just once, right before she rejected me forever. Well, I kissed her once before that but she called it ‘assault’ and punched me in the face.”

“So I guess you weren’t that good at it, huh?” Nessie looked at him through her lashes, holding back a grin.

“Your mom probably doesn’t even remember it, it was that insignificant. You’re not gonna hold something like that against me that happened before you were born, are you? Come on, you know you’re everything to me.”

“Yes, but you imprinted on me, didn’t you? You couldn’t help it.”

“Well...that’s true, but that is the deepest, most powerful kind of love there is and that’s what I feel for you. I will never stop loving you—you and only you...forever. You’re gonna get over this, right?”

“I’ll think about it.”

“Come on, Nessie. Don’t leave me hangin’ here!”

She grinned and began running toward the river, making a great leap across. Jacob leaped after her and phased in the air, coming down on all four paws on the other side as I watched through the living room window. His shredded clothes floated down behind him into the river.

I suppose she had seen him and most of the other wolves naked. She spent much of her time with the packs and they didn’t always make it into the woods to phase if they were in a hurry or if they perceived a threat. She’d surely seen plenty of bare behinds at least. I never noticed her thinking about it, though. When she was younger, she enjoyed running around naked with them, in fact. Like a naturist child, she seemed to accept nudity for what it was without fanfare.

As far as I could tell, Nessie hadn’t fallen for Jacob at that age. She’d just turned three, which made her about fifteen in human years. We had no idea how the transition would happen, if it did, from Jacob as her buddy to Jacob as a potential mate, since she was the first imprintee of the Quileute wolves to grow up. Claire was the only other child to have been imprinted upon so far and she would be a child for years to come.

Right around her third birthday, Renesmee reached puberty and started to become interested in boys as boys. Embry was still unattached and his name came up more than a little when Jacob wasn’t around. She was also intrigued by several boys from Forks whom she’d met at First Beach.

It had been impossible to know what to do. As Nessie’s parents, should we encourage her to date other boys besides Jake? Should we move away for a time to give her a chance to do that? If we did and Nessie found a

boy she liked, what could ever become of that? A human would grow old and die. Would we be setting ourselves up to change another individual? Nessie's mother had adapted to our otherworldly existence and chosen to become a vampire, but I imagined her to be a rare human.

If we stayed in Forks and she wanted to date Quileute boys—Embry, say—would that even be possible? Being part of Jacob's pack and his brother, Embry would turn her down, probably. Wouldn't he have to? So the only other options would be Brady or Collin from Sam's pack or a boy who hadn't inherited the werewolf gene. But the wolves would abandon her if they ever imprinted on someone and the non-werewolf Quileute would grow old and die. Would the Quileute allow one of their own to be changed to a vampire? Doubtful, especially since Jake already had imprinted on her.

Then there was Nahuel, the only male vampire-human hybrid we knew to exist. We thought it would be good for Nessie to meet him now that she was a little older, if only to remember that she wasn't the only one of her kind in existence. We hoped to meet Nahuel's sisters too. We were planning a trip to the Amazon the following summer when she would have a chance to do that, but we assumed Jacob would insist on going with us when we told him about it.

Bella and I had had so many questions—it had been a confusing time. Only Nessie seemed completely unperturbed by all the issues we saw on the near horizon. We finally decided just to let her tell us how she felt and what she wanted as time went along.

As far as the Quileute were concerned, we discovered that there was no issue for them either, no gray area at all. Everyone in the tribe considered Jacob and Nessie to be betrothed from the time Nessie was a baby. No Quileute boy ever would try to go around Jacob to get to our daughter. Even among the tribal members who didn't know about their wolf heritage, it was simply understood.

Visitors from the Makah tribe were another matter. The boys from Neah Bay had no qualms about horning in on a Quileute's girl. They even considered it an entertaining challenge, as did the boys from the Quinault and Hoh reservations. And Nessie was beautiful. Even if I weren't her father, I couldn't not know how appealing she was to everyone who met her. But the boys who wanted to date Nessie quickly backed off when Jacob Black made it clear that she was spoken for. His physical presence was too intimidating for any suitor to challenge him.

I worried sometimes whether that was fair to Renesmee and whether she shouldn't have a chance to date other people and choose for herself what she wanted. But the bond between vampire mates is quite similar to werewolf imprinting. Once we find our mates, the bond is strong and permanent. Perhaps that was true for Nessie too and Jacob was already her bonded mate even as she moved through the stages of growing up. When Bella was pregnant, she became particularly attached to Jacob, drawing him to her side more and more as she got closer to term. Both she and Jacob came to believe that the pull wasn't from Bella at all, but from Nessie inside Bella's womb. If so, then perhaps she already had chosen Jacob before he imprinted on her.

In spite of our concerns for Renesmee's freedom to choose, we never doubted that Jacob would be a wonderful mate. We knew that she would be happy with him. We even speculated that together they might be fertile. Part of the wolves' imprinting phenomenon was the instinctive attraction to partners with whom they could perpetuate the wolf gene. Jacob's imprinting on Nessie, therefore, implied that the two of them might be compatible for procreation.

The idea of being a grandfather someday pleased me tremendously. The possibility of descendants was something we gave up when we became vampires. But Nessie had retained the reproductive biology of a human female as far as Carlisle could determine. She began having menstrual periods at the appropriate equivalent age for a human, though her cycle was longer than a human's—every three months.

Looking back, I realize that it was about that time that Renesmee became shy around Jacob in the manner of teenage girls everywhere, establishing boundaries of privacy with him that they'd never had when she was a child. It all seemed perfectly natural and right on track.

Edward

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