

THE DAY WOULD COME

The day was bound to come when Jacob Black pressed his suit for my daughter's hand. He had been giving her "promise" jewelry of various types since she was a toddler, but I, if not Bella, maintained that Renesmee should be free to choose her mate notwithstanding Jacob's devotion. I felt that at least she should be exposed to other possibilities. Though I wasn't advocating for it necessarily, I thought it conceivable that her eyes might stray from her childhood companion, caretaker, and friend.

We visited the Amazon when Nessie was about twelve in human-equivalent years. She missed Zafrina after they became friends when she was four months old. She and the Amazonian vampire share a similar gift—the ability to produce images in the minds of others. Renesmee had come out of the womb with her extraordinary talent, but since meeting Zafrina she'd wanted to learn how to extend it beyond her own body, to put pictures in others' minds without needing to touch them. She also wanted to learn how to mesmerize groups of people with a common illusion as Zafrina could do.

In addition to seeing our Amazonian friends Zafrina, Kachiri, and Senna, Bella and I wanted to give Nessie another chance to spend time with Nahuel, the only male vampire/human hybrid we know of in the world. I thought she might be drawn to one of her own species, even if the two of them had profoundly different cultural backgrounds.

Renesmee and Nahuel did hit it off insofar as they were allowed to get acquainted. When Jacob learned of our plans to visit South America, he insisted on escorting Renesmee, though I tried to convince him to stay home. He seemed genetically wired never to stray more than a few miles from Nessie at any time. He couldn't

imagine letting her travel anywhere without him, even less to somewhere so distant where she would meet a potential rival.

So Jacob came with us to the Amazon and prevented Renesmee from spending a minute alone with Nahuel. Jacob was so antagonistic, in fact, that Nessie could barely converse with the Amazonian in Jacob's presence. At her insistence, he finally agreed to change to his wolf form and follow behind her and Nahuel when they set off together because she had so many questions to ask her genetic counterpart about his life. They also shared details of their experiences as half-breeds—eating human food, being a few steps behind their vampire relatives in every physical pursuit, being unique in the world—and Nahuel explained how he handled all of his family's non-hunting interactions with humans because he could pass for human much more easily than the vampire women.

Much to our surprise, Nahuel remained as he had been the last time we met him—more interested in Renesmee's mother than in Renesmee herself. He had siblings to fill in the gap that existed in Nessie's life, but he had never known his own or any of his sisters' mothers, since none had survived the birth of their children. To him, Bella was the miracle rather than himself and Renesmee. His father Johan, whom the Volturi had not yet confronted and destroyed, had sired half a dozen children, though Nahuel was the only son.

Additionally, though Nahuel enjoyed spending time with Renesmee, the two of them talking and testing their physical abilities against one another, he seemed to feel no particular romantic attraction for her, nor she for him. When we asked her about it, she said that he felt very much like Jacob to her... a brother or cousin or just a friend.

We returned to the Amazon a year ago when Renesmee was seventeen or eighteen, human-equivalent, and though she and Nahuel enjoyed reconnecting and spending time together (with Jacob tagging along as "minder"), their interactions remained on

a friendship level. We found out from Zafrina that Nahuel had begun following in his father's footsteps, cultivating a sexual predilection for human women. The Amazonian coven was not vegetarian and it was clear to me that Nahuel—though not bedding humans necessarily as a prelude to killing them—did not suffer overmuch when he drained his female lovers. I also read from his thoughts, but didn't share it with Bella, that he killed them immediately if they conceived because he did not want to create more motherless children like himself. Kachiri told Bella that Nahuel had shown no preference for any of his conquests and never had considered transforming one to be his mate. Perhaps when he met the right woman, as I had, that would change. Until that time, Nahuel was not interested in being celibate.

That last point was one reason why Bella and I didn't intervene when Jacob insisted on chaperoning Renesmee and Nahuel. We thought that Nahuel might find our beautiful teenage daughter a fitting conquest, possibly an exotic attraction. We knew that out of respect for Carlisle, the blood-drinking Amazonian women would never harm Renesmee—that, in fact, they loved her—but as the son of Johan, we were never altogether sure about trusting Nahuel with Nessie. We weren't willing to take any chances with either her blood or her maidenhood. And Jacob certainly wasn't! He made himself Renesmee's protector during our journey and when she slept, he slept in wolf form by her side.

As Nessie grew up, Bella and I had given her other opportunities to meet boys besides Jacob. She attended the reservation school, though by three years old she was already teaching math and science to the younger students. We also enrolled her in advanced placement classes at Evergreen State College in Olympia. Though they found her attractive, the college boys regarded Renesmee as a child prodigy too young to court, particularly since she was accompanied everywhere she went by a gigantic Indian bodyguard. Though we assumed that Jacob would keep any boys who might be

romantically interested in our daughter at bay, we also believed that meeting them was good for Nessie because ultimately the choice of a mate would be hers.

Jacob had approached me when Renesmee was almost four—approximately sixteen in human years—and asked my permission to become engaged to her. He had promised himself to her without my permission from the time of her birth, but this was different. He knew that with Nessie being so young he would need her parents' consent for a formal engagement.

After consulting Bella, I refused his request. Bella was less opposed than I was because she considered their engagement to be inevitable, but we both felt that Jacob was panicking because he had witnessed the attentions given to Renesmee by other males and feared that she might find someone else to love. We didn't feel that Jacob's anxiety was a good reason to force such an important decision on Renesmee before she had shown any inclination to address it herself. We insisted that he wait one more year and we would reconsider at that time.

We knew that at some point, it would no longer be up to us to approve or disapprove of Nessie's choice of a mate because she would be old enough to decide for herself. But we hoped to postpone that time as long as possible because, though we had a sense of Renesmee's emotional age, we wanted to be conservative and protect her from any pressure to make such a permanent decision before she was ready. In fact, we preferred that it be her idea to become engaged to Jacob if that was her choice. Of course, he was ready to secure Renesmee to him—he'd been waiting for her for years. I think I convinced him that hurrying her along on a preset course wouldn't be fair to her.

Renesmee's menstrual cycle began just before she turned four years old. It was a bittersweet event for her father. How little time we'd had with our child as a child! But lamenting it didn't change

anything. Renesmee was physically a woman and if she continued to mature as humans did, though on her much accelerated scale, she would undoubtedly begin to experience the physical cravings of a mature woman. I can attest to the fact that Bella was ready to start a physical relationship with me almost from the moment of our first kiss. It had taken every ounce of strength and willpower I could muster to put her off until we were married.

We didn't assume that Nessie would be just like her mother, especially since she had known her primary suitor for her entire life. But in fact, we couldn't assume anything. Nessie was truly one of a kind. As she grew, we presented her with the usual parental information about her body (insofar as we understood her anatomy), about physical desire, love, and personal responsibility. Her usual reaction was to roll her eyes—like her father had always done, Bella claims—implying “oh, not *this* again.” The talks didn't interest her much.

But everything changed when Renesmee reached four-and-a-half years old, somewhere between seventeen and nineteen in human years, and Bella and I saw the writing on the wall. We knew that soon it would be our daughter asking for our permission to become engaged—we hoped—or telling us that she had already become engaged. We weren't wrong.

Edward

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