We returned from the Olympic National Forest with Bella feeling full if not entirely satisfied. She had taken an elk and a black-tailed deer, neither of which she enjoyed, but afterwards, she said she felt “sloshy,” and didn’t want to keep looking for a cougar or bear. I hoped the herbivores would hold her as well as the cougar had two days before. When I pressed her, she said she felt pretty much the same as she had after her first hunt, still thirsty, but not in a way that she couldn’t tolerate.

It was a familiar feeling to all of us who had been vegetarians for decades—that sense of being full, but not sated. It was irritating, but bearable. Bella was shockingly like a seasoned veteran after only three days. She was impulsive and emotional like a newborn, but bizarrely controlled.

When I asked her how she’d felt being around Charlie, she said the burn was bad when she breathed and that she longed to soothe it with what she knew would soothe it, but then she would remember he was her dad. Thinking about drinking her dad’s blood was like thinking of her parents having sex. It was “icky” and turned off the urge instantly. As far as the wolves went, they smelled “gamey” and unappetizing as they did to us all. She said that Renesmee had a tasty scent but that it was cut with the sweet smell of vampire and affected her like pouring perfume on food. Sue was coming for a visit in a short while. She would be the first non-wolf, non-relative, non-hybrid human Bella would be near—her first real test.

“Are you concerned about Sue?” I asked while we waited for Charlie and Sue to arrive. Seth told us that they were picking up a quick bite before coming over. Though Charlie knew we had food in the house, he’d noticed that we never seemed to cook when he was there and nobody ever sat down to eat. Though Alice, Esme, or Jacob might offer him a snack, he and Jacob or Seth would be the only ones eating in the Cullen house and it made him uncomfortable.

Bella said, “I don’t know how Sue will smell to me. Charlie smells good, but I can handle that. I don’t know Sue all that well, so I hope that doesn’t make it worse. No way to know but to try. So far, I’ve been okay, except when Jacob made me mad. I don’t think Sue will make me mad, so…” That was more words than Bella customarily spoke in one go. I interpreted that to mean she was nervous.

“How much have you been around Sue? Will you look a great deal different to her?”

“Well…she was at the tribal council meeting after Harry died and you came back. We were all there for three or four hours. I didn’t talk to her as far as I can remember. She probably also saw me when I visited Jacob once in a while.”
“She knows what we are, though, and what you are now, so she shouldn’t be too surprised, I expect. She won’t be shocked or sad like Charlie was and she’ll probably be focused on Renesmee, so…”

“Just stay with me, okay?”

“Of course, love. I won’t leave your side.” I held her around the waist and she laid her cheek on my chest. In just ten seconds, we both perked up our ears. Charlie’s patrol car was turning into the driveway.

“Here we go!” Bella said nervously. “Where’s Renesmee?”

Carlisle appeared on the staircase carrying the baby. She was expressing her delight with her hand on his neck. *Momma and Da are back!*

“Yes, and Grandpa Charlie is coming to see you,” Carlisle told her. Renesmee showed him a picture of Charlie. “Yes, that’s right.” Renesmee was elated.

“Come to Momma,” Bella said, stretching out her arms. Renesmee had things to tell her mother…Carlisle had shown her his computer, Jacob had taken her into the forest in the afternoon, and Nana had let her play with her colored pencils and paper until she bit one of the pencils in half and gouged it all the way through the pad.

“Was Nana angry with you?” Bella inquired. Renesmee shook her head no. Nana had just taken the things away and replaced them with the sterling silver flatware the baby had already destroyed.

“Well, we have paper and pencils for you at the cottage,” Bella said. “When you learn how to hold them gently, then you can draw like Nana.”

I took Nessie’s hand. “Grandpa Charlie and Sue will be here very soon,” I told her. “Sue will smell like Grandpa, but you mustn’t bite her.” Nessie wanted to know again whether she could bite Jacob.

“Yes, but he’s the only human you’re allowed to bite.” Our six-day-old baby nodded solemnly and I smirked to myself.

When the doorbell rang, Carlisle went to greet our guests and Bella and I sat on the sofa with Renesmee. Already I could hear Sue’s nervous thoughts.

*Vampires! Charlie’s daughter is a vampire. Ugh! Gives me the creeps. I can’t believe I agreed to visit here with him. But Charlie can’t help it…and I should talk…my kids are werewolves! Maybe we were meant for each other. Who else would want us? Our lives are too weird. And heaven knows there’s a shortage of men on the rez—any rez…Makah, Hoh, Salish—you name it. What ‘Nam didn’t take, the drink has. Now Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf. At least the Quileute have a larger purpose that keeps us going…killing the killers…What am I doing here at—*

“Charlie, Sue, welcome!”

“Carlisle. The kids said it was okay to come.” Charlie’s voice was gruff.

“Certainly, you are welcome. Come in, come in. They’re waiting for you. Sue, have you met Esme, my wife?”

“Welcome, Sue! It’s nice to meet you.”
“Likewise.” I guess. Wow, these are some handsome people, though, or... whatever.

“There she is! Little Nessie!”

GAMPA! Renesmee reached toward Charlie, but then saw Sue, pulled her arms back, and retreated behind Bella’s hair. She peeked out cautiously.

“Dad, hi! Hi, Sue! Thanks for coming.”

“Charlie,” I greeted him. “Renesmee has been waiting for you. Sue, this is our daughter, Renesmee. Nessie, this is Sue. She’s come to meet you.”

Renesmee peeked out again. Sue seemed a little scary to her. She wasn’t reacting the way Nessie was used to. Sue didn’t smile and she stood partially hidden behind Charlie.

“How are you, pretty baby?” Charlie bent down on one knee to speak to Nessie. She came out from behind Bella’s hair, looked suspiciously at Sue, and then threw her arms out to Charlie. Bella let her go as Charlie scooped her into his arms. He was noticeably less awkward than the day before. “What’s the news?” he asked Nessie casually.

Before we could react—though, really, what could we do?—our child looked in Charlie’s eyes and touched his cheek. She’d taken his question literally and wanted to tell him her news. She showed him her room through the bars of the crib. A look of shock crossed Charlie’s face and his mouth dropped open. WHAT THE HELL? He jerked his head away from Nessie’s palm and stared at her, the color draining from his face.

“Calm down, Dad, it’s okay,” Bella said.

“But…but….” His heart was racing and he started gulping air.

“Remember, Dad, when Jacob told you that Renesmee was a good communicator?”

Charlie stared at Nessie, his eyes wide. She was holding up her hand, waiting for “Gampa” to catch up with the program. She was used to this reaction, but it made her impatient.

“Renesmee is telling you her news,” I told him calmly. “She slept in her own crib in her own room for the first time last night.” Charlie gaped at the baby, but she simply batted her hand toward his face as he leaned away. She had more to say.

“It’s really okay, Dad,” Bella tried. “Jacob told you she was special, right?”

Need to know, need to know... Though Charlie hadn’t recovered, the look of stoic impatience on Nessie’s face nearly made him laugh in spite of himself. He moved his face slowly back toward her hand.

Renesmee showed him the highlights of her day...sitting in the bathroom sink with Alice, Rose, and Bella laughing at her as she splashed water; the silly faces Alice made to get her to smile for the camera; and last, but certainly not least—to me anyway—an image of me standing over her holding a pillow over my private parts. Charlie let out a loud snort and cast his eyes my way, but was immediately pulled back to Nessie’s pictures by a pat of her hand on his cheek.

Oh, great! So much for the whole naturist family idea. It was just as well that Bella couldn’t read Nessie’s communications with others. I would have to monitor them and
teach our daughter the difference between private and public information. *Is that in the book?*

Nessie’s sharing continued. She showed Charlie the yellow and lavender walls of her room, the pictures of Peter Rabbit and his friends on the wall, and Momma wearing a bed sheet, rocking her. When Nessie was finished, she looked at her grandpa expectantly. The force of her gaze was too much for Charlie, who had no choice but to respond like a grandfather.

“Well, Nessie, that’s really something!” he said and was rewarded with the rare toothy smile. That sealed the deal. Charlie’s heart melted.

“Have a seat, Charlie…Sue.” I motioned to the two lounge chairs. If Charlie fainted, I didn’t want him dropping my child.

Charlie looked at Sue, as if to say, *You okay with this?* Sue raised her eyebrows, not understanding what was going on. She sat down in the seat farthest from the couch and I noticed that the rest of my family had made themselves scarce. The look on Sue’s face as she stepped into the vampire’s den had been obvious enough for anyone to read.

Where was Jacob, anyway? And Seth? I hadn’t seen them since we returned from our hunt. Just then, I heard the Ferrari whipping up the long drive. It was going fast, but not vampire fast—the missing wolves! *Good.* It took just a couple minutes for Jacob and Seth to walk through the kitchen.

*JAK UH!* Nessie leaned toward Jacob and he scooped her out of Charlie’s arms.

“Didya miss me, Ness?” he asked in the high-toned voice he used to talk to the baby. Charlie’s eyebrows rose in a sideways glance toward Sue. This time Sue was not puzzled. This was a part of her world that she knew only too well, having suffered along with Leah when Sam imprinted on Emily. She was wondering whether she could or should explain it to Charlie or whether he would misunderstand like everyone did and go after Jacob. *Better leave that one to somebody else,* she decided. *Too risky.*

“Hi, Mom. Hi, Charlie.” Seth came in, his face flushed and a jittery excitement in his body. “We took a ride in Bella’s Ferrari! Wow! It’s amazing! You gotta come see it!” Nobody was bothering to ask Bella’s permission to drive it anymore, so it probably was a good thing that she didn’t feel especially proprietary about it.

“Yeah, come on, Charlie. Let’s go look at the car,” Jacob encouraged.

“Would you like to?” Charlie asked Sue. She nodded. *Anything to get out of here…,* she thought, though she’d started breathing easier when Seth came in behaving as if it were the most natural thing in the world to hang out with vampires. The four of them with Renesmee tromped out to the garage.

“Nice diversion,” Bella said, taking some much-needed breaths.

“There were more humans in the room than vampires. How are you feeling?” I asked.

“I’m fine.”

“Seriously, how are you doing?” I repeated, ignoring her dismissive response.
“Well, Charlie’s scent is by far the most appealing one in the room, but since he’s my dad, that’s okay. Sue bothers me too, but more for her ‘deer-in-the-headlights’ look than anything else.”

“Really?”

“Yes. My throat is burning, but I don’t want to drink people I know. It takes away the appeal.”

I marveled at her, half in shock at her uncanny composure. If Jasper were here, he would be completely dumbfounded. I realized then that he was just outside the front door, standing inconspicuously nearby in case he was needed. Yup, he was dumbfounded all right!

“I love you!” I burst out, wrapping my arms around my miraculous wife and hugging her tightly. “You’re brilliant!”

Bella hugged me back and her breathing began to accelerate. Sometimes I did miss the sound of that pumping heart, a vivid indicator of my wife’s “romantic” excitement, though I was reading the signals of her new body better all the time.

“Oh, Edward…I’m so happy!”

Her words startled me, given the challenges this evening had to be posing for Bella. But they also made me happy. I felt a rush of joy and “clacked” my lips against hers enthusiastically. She responded with equal enthusiasm. By the time the back door opened, we were into full “snogging” mode. I jerked away from Bella like a teenager caught making out with her on the couch by her father—oh wait, that’s what I was!—and began to laugh. Bella started giggling too and by the time Jacob and Charlie led the way into the room we were nearly helpless with unconcealed mirth. I made a feint at her lips with mine. She dodged me and we burst into renewed laughter.

“Okay, you kids, what’s going on in here?” boomed Charlie. He’d reverted instantly to his role of the previous two years—keeping an eye on us every evening at his house while we were courting.

Bella was overcome by another laugh attack, her bell-like voice ringing through the air. It bordered on hysteria. The surprising sound jolted Charlie back to the present and to the reality of his much-changed daughter. His face turned pale. Sue took his hand and looked at him with a concerned expression. Bella was grasping her throat. Gulping air with all these humans around couldn’t be pleasant for her. I tightened my arm around her shoulders.

Renesmee, seeing her mother nearly doubled over with laughter, let out an odd squeal followed by another. The unusual noise coming from our normally silent child startled everyone. We all came to attention and stared at her. Her open-mouthed smile was as wide as it would go, making her cheeks rise and turning her eyes into slits. Suddenly, everyone in the room was shortling along with her. The more we laughed, the more she squawked, which made us laugh even more.

Carlisle and Esme appeared at the top of the stairs, coming to see what all the
commotion was about. When they saw Renesmee’s face, they both started chuckling. It was too bad Alice and Rose weren’t back from Seattle. Alice would have loved snapping photographs right and left at this happy family scene.

After several minutes, Renesmee put her hand to Jacob’s cheek. She was thirsty.

“Nessie’s ready for her dinner,” Jacob told us. “I’ll take care of it,” he said, turning toward the kitchen.

“Why don’t you hand her to us first,” said Carlisle, holding up his measuring tape. Jacob passed the baby to Esme and left. Renesmee dutifully stretched out tall in Esme’s arms and waited for Carlisle to finish. He measured her length followed by the circumference of her head before Esme carried her to the kitchen for her dinner.

“You do that regularly?” asked Charlie.

“Yes, Renesmee is a fast grower. We’re keeping a close eye on it,” Carlisle replied.

“Is she…okay?” ventured Charlie, suddenly disturbed. Sue took Charlie’s hand again, a move that did not go unnoticed by Bella. She looked at me and raised her eyebrows. I grinned surreptitiously.

“It’s outside the norm,” Carlisle said, choosing his words carefully. “But that doesn’t mean it’s abnormal for her. She’s a remarkable child.”

“Yes, she is,” Charlie agreed. The room grew quiet, and an awkward silence fell over the group. Then, with perfect timing, Emmett saved us all by striding into the room and flicking on the television—the pregame show for Monday night football had begun.

“That is some car you’ve got, Bella!” he exclaimed.

“That was an ignorant question, even for Emmett. I smiled.

“It must have cost a bundle,” Charlie commented. Both he and Sue had been wondering to themselves where the money came from. Time for the public story.

“Nothing too good for Bella, though I’m not sure she fully appreciates it.” I grinned at her and she wrinkled her nose at me. “My parents left me an inheritance and a Ferrari is an investment.”

“Well, as long as you’re not wasting it,” Charlie said to me brusquely. “You’ve got a family to support now. And what about Dartmouth? Are you still going to college?”

“Bella and I are revisiting our plans now that we have Renesmee,” I replied.

“Dartmouth will take us when we’re ready. I may start correspondence courses.”

“Hard to find good work around here,” Charlie went on.

“That’s true. We’re not too far from Seattle, though. Maybe we can go to the University of Washington and work in the city.” I was winging it now. “But you don’t have to worry about Bella and Renesmee. They’re my first priorities,” I promised. He grunted in reply.

“What did I hear about you moving to Seattle?” Jacob asked anxiously, walking into the room with the baby. Renesmee had fallen asleep with her mouth open, her tiny pink lips forming a soft “O” shape.

“Oh, isn’t that cute!” Sue whispered to Charlie.
“Sure is. Guess we’d better get going. It’s the baby’s bedtime.” Bella and I stood up. I was ignoring Jacob’s question.

“Thanks for coming by Sue, Charlie,” I said. “Renesmee looks forward to seeing you.”

“I like seeing her. Maybe I’ll come by after work tomorrow?” It was half-question, half statement.

“That would be great, Dad,” Bella told him, taking Renesmee into her arms. Charlie stroked the baby’s smooth forearm with his fingers.

“She’s really something,” Charlie muttered as he gestured for Sue to lead the way. Carlisle held the door for them as they left. Bella breathed a sigh of relief.