

## Losing Her

*My sister's twenty-year-old vision terrorized me for the longest time—my daughter lying in a bloody childbirth bed before exiting the picture completely. Renesmee's future had disappeared. Alice compulsively traced path after path through her mind trying to track down my child, but she simply couldn't find Nessie after that day. I knew what that meant. We both did.*

*There was little I could do but stand by and wait. It was exactly as agonizing as it had been to watch Bella's pregnancy proceed to its relentless, tragic end. I never thought I'd have to experience anything so excruciating again. The situation was mitigated only by the hope that some action in the present might alter the direction of Nessie's future. I vowed to do everything in my power, everything I could think of, to make my daughter reappear.*

*I immediately set myself against Jacob and Renesmee's courtship despite the fact that she had already proposed to him and he had accepted. The likelihood of her backing out was miniscule, I knew, but I tried to convince her all the same. At first she thought I was joking and laughed at my pathetic attempt at humor. When she realized I was in earnest, she scoffed, grew angry, and then stopped speaking to me. She didn't have to speak. I heard her every curse loud and clear.*

*Next I turned to Jacob, knowing if he understood what was coming, I'd win his cooperation. He would die before he'd allow Renesmee's future to be compromised.*

*Convincing him wasn't as easy as I had hoped, though Jacob had seen Alice's visions play out time and time again. He clung to the belief that the Fortune Teller—his newly revived nickname for Alice—couldn't predict his future, or by extension, that of his chosen*

mate. He had a point, but truth be told, the alternative was simply too dreadful for him to face.

Alice had had trouble seeing the future of the Quileute wolves from the beginning of our acquaintance. She'd also lost sight of Bella's future while our daughter was growing in her womb. Alice, more than a little embarrassed by these anomalies, tried to explain them away as artifacts of Renesmee and Jacob's hybrid natures. She couldn't see the future of those with genetic makeup different than her own.

Regardless of what she said or believed, after Nessie was born Alice practiced unceasingly to overcome the deficiencies of her gift. We'd learned a lot from our time with Cousin Kate, Zafrina, and Benjamin about exercising vampire talents to develop and extend them. Bella had learned to lift her mental shield, giving me access to her thoughts, and to project it outside herself to protect our family and friends. The more she practiced, the more skillful she became at doing both. Alice had never worked to sharpen her precognition, because she'd not found any significant limitations to it until Renesmee came along.

After our terrifying encounter with the Volturi, which only the talents of our family and friends enabled us to survive, Alice made a great effort to improve her future sight for Renesmee. Being unique in the world makes Nessie vulnerable to all kinds of danger, and we needed my sister's gift in our arsenal of talents to keep her safe.

The more Alice labored, the better she got. After a year of constant effort, she could reliably summon images of Renesmee's future with a tolerable degree of certitude. As Jacob became more and more a part of our family, Alice quietly took on the challenge of finding his future too, though with less than perfect accuracy. When a wolf phases, according to Alice, his future becomes fluid, a soup of blended possibilities. Not until he returns to his human form does the image re-solidify, though often it is altered. Alice hates

revealing anything she sees of Jacob, because visions with him present prove wrong more often than she likes to admit.

In spite of Alice's precognitive achievements, or perhaps because of them, my sister and I were traumatized when we saw Renesmee lying in that bedchamber like...as she was. It seemed evident that if that day ever came, my daughter was unlikely to survive it.

I desperately wanted to protect Bella from the vision and so did Alice, who turned to Jasper for reassurance as I confided in Carlisle. There was no need for my wife to suffer over an illusory scene that might never come to pass.

Even having Nahuel as an exemplar and gleaning what information we could about his sisters' lives, we'd learned only one thing for certain—that every dhampir<sup>1</sup> is unique. Which traits a human/vampire child inherits from each parent and how the chromosomes combine differ in each case.

We are lucky to have Carlisle. Due to his diligence (bordering on obsession) at recording data about Renesmee—from her growth rate, to her reproductive cycles, to her DNA composition—we've collected volumes of information about our precious child. One thing we know now that we didn't know then is that with her unique biology, Renesmee exists in a murky zone between physical vulnerability and immortality. She experiences the full range and magnitude of human pain and suffering, but without the blessing of release either through pharmacy or death.

It is a devastating truth, one for which I bear full responsibility. If only we had known when Bella and I married that I was fertile, what might we have done differently?

My father minimizes my guilt for the enormous suffering I have caused both my wife and my child, and out of respect for his

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<sup>1</sup>The ancient Balkan word for Nessie's kind

feelings, I try not to speak of it in his presence. His assurances do not comfort me, though. My culpability stems from the first day I laid eyes on Bella in the Forks High School cafeteria and found myself unable to stay away from her. I disregarded what I knew of right and wrong and vacillated unforgivably. I pursued her relentlessly one year and abandoned her the next. I overreacted to news of her demise and beckoned her towards death at the hands of the Volturi. I agreed to take her humanity, then caused her suffering beyond measure. I have failed spectacularly at every turn to protect my beloved from harm.

*She loves me still. I don't know why.*

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The bottom line was that Alice's vision made it untenable for Renesmee to marry Jacob Black. So I resisted at every turn when my daughter and my wife began making plans for a union I believed would destroy our lives. The family thought I'd gone mad, so adamant was I that Jacob Black should not have my precious child.

Bella pleaded and argued with me to grant Nessie my blessing, pointing out that after our showdown with the Volturi, I'd admitted Jacob was uniquely suited to love and care for our daughter. Knowing me as she does, Bella deduced I was hiding something from her and made a great effort to unearth it, but I didn't let her tear the truth from me. What would be the point of letting her suffer for a future I would prevent at any cost?

When every discouragement I devised failed to turn Jacob away, I resorted to the truth, hoping without hope that he could let my daughter go. Much to his credit, he tried. After battling both himself and me for two solid weeks, frightening Renesmee with his obvious, but nameless, struggle, he quietly transformed to a russet-colored beast and took off for the north. His every stride was an agony, and it pained me likewise to witness his suffering, a suffering I knew so

well. He carried extra burdens, though, of genetic destiny, of tribal responsibility, and of memories of an earlier time when he'd tried to outrun a demon gnawing at his soul.

I lost my daughter then, lost her while trying to save her. Her lifelong companion and devoted beau, her true love, had abandoned her with no goodbye, and she understood well enough that it was I more than he who had betrayed her. A fierce, cold anger she didn't try to tame or hide took up residence in the place where love for her father once had resided.

Of course, Renesmee defied my warnings and admonitions and left to track him down. Jacob's pack had grasped the situation instantly when he phased and filled the night sky with howls of pain and regret. Though they heeded his wishes to let him go alone, I knew they would not forsake my daughter in her distress. She would be safe on her sojourn.

Bella tried but could not dislodge me when I trapped her beneath my body to prevent her from interfering. Nessie would locate her Jacob, I knew, and I could only hope he'd find the strength to resist her attempts to coax him back. He had enough to endure without my wife confronting and possibly harming him in her misunderstanding of his actions. Bella is nothing if not a fiercely protective mother, and I could not allow her to hurt Jacob when his first impulse would be to let her.

In the end, none of my manipulations or maneuvering, scheming or demands mattered in the least. As I had suspected, the genetic makeup of a Quileute wolf won't allow him to abandon the object of his imprinting. My son-in-law confided later that he'd had to harvest moose tendon and affix himself to trees and boulders when he slept to prevent instinct from catapulting him back to his love.

Though Jacob had tried to backtrack and obscure his scent trail by running in rivers, it didn't prevent Renesmee from finding him. After four days she caught up to the hungry, bedraggled wolf on Ellesmere Island in Canada's Northern Territories. He scented her then and his fate, as well as ours, was sealed. So powerful is the Quileute Nation's compulsion to perpetuate its wolf gene that Carlisle and I both felt sure the couple would prove fertile.

The months that followed felt like a slow-motion train wreck, one relentless turn of the wheel after another carrying us all to an inescapable destiny. Though an actor in the drama, Jacob fared little better than I, notwithstanding the hubris of youth which let him believe he could signal a switch in the track before the crisis befell us.

It remained unsaid, but was understood between us, that should Renesmee perish, Jacob would follow soon after. In all the ways the drama could unfold, none of which Alice could discern, I admit to hoping for no surviving progeny, no bitter souvenir of the tragedy of our children's short lives.

Ironically, I felt a certain optimism when Nessie banned me from her wedding and denied me the privilege of escorting her to the altar. Stubborn as me in her feminine way, Nessie could not be persuaded to pardon me for sending Jacob away, and so I watched the ceremony from a hundred miles yon, far enough to discourage my returning to spoil her special day. Painful as banishment was, my absence had altered Alice's vision and gave me hope that the future could be averted, though the rest of the wedding—the setting, the sounds, the garments—was much as my sister had foreseen.

To my great relief, my daughter forgave my transgressions after fully venting her spleen. Blissful in her newly wedded state, she even contained her fury when I demanded her promise that she wouldn't conceive a child. She thought me understandably irrational on the subject and knew I was trying to protect her from something, though

*she imagined the danger to be only in my mind. I couldn't bring myself to tell her the truth and the truth could always change in any case. Should we lose her in the end, I didn't want her brief conjugal happiness to be overshadowed by dark threats of death.*

*Perhaps it is axiomatic that I attacked Jacob Black the day he faced me like a man to tell me my daughter carried his child. Carlisle has always claimed that I have enormous self-control, and I like to believe it is true. On this occasion, however, Emmett and Jasper had to intervene before I murdered the wretched mongrel.*

*I refuse to consider the irony of my wanting to kill Jacob for impregnating my daughter. Our collective history is simply too ludicrous for words.*

*Edward*

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