

The Aftermath

Numerous times since Renesmee's birth, Jacob Black and I have argued and battled over everything from my daughter's education to family travels to healthcare to premarital living arrangements. We'd settle one issue, things would be fine for a while, and another would present itself. It was only out of love for Renesmee and Bella that we managed time and again to reach a compromise.

Aside from Renesmee's pregnancy, which happened later, this particular issue was the worst by far. Jacob Black hadn't gotten so thoroughly under my skin since Bella's and my courtship days. His intransigence on the matter tweaked my vampire impulses until sometimes I wanted to wring his neck.

The huge, protracted dustup began a year after the car accident that had injured our daughter so dreadfully. The cause for this immense tension and angst? Renesmee's new car.

For the average family, a new vehicle purchase is a choice made by balancing some basic concerns: budget, safety, fuel efficiency, and aesthetics. For a Cullen—or at least for me—safety is paramount for our more delicate family members. All other considerations are minor by comparison. The problem was that Renesmee was no longer just a Cullen. She was attached forevermore to a Black. It complicated matters significantly.

The subject arose a short time after Carlisle declared Renesmee healed enough to move from our house back to her and Jacob's home on the reservation. She and I were alone in their small, quaint kitchen, discussing the weather, the mice problem that had arisen during her absence, and other mundane concerns.

Then she said it. "Once I'm one hundred percent, Jacob and I are heading to Seattle to go car shopping. It'll be a fun..."

Jacob. Car shopping. Seattle.

My mind kicked into overdrive, spinning through a Rolodex of automotive deathtraps, tin cans, and coffins-on-wheels that Jacob would consider “awesome” and “badass.”

Nessie had continued talking and laughing, but I heard nothing more. I was too busy calculating the many ways she could be ravaged while driving, all the perils she would be subject to despite her dhampir nature. With our new knowledge of Renesmee’s physical vulnerabilities, I was more concerned than ever about her safety on the road. I could not allow Jacob to choose a vehicle that would jeopardize her health or, potentially, her life.

Nessie was at home and at ease, happy and content. She’d been through so much. I didn’t want to disrupt our moment together by discussing my concerns with her. So when she retired for a nap, I took up the car issue with Jacob.

The subject was straightforward and I didn’t see any potential for disagreement, since we shared our concern for Renesmee. I explained that I would handle the arrangements and cost of securing Renesmee a replacement vehicle, Bella’s old Guardian having come to mind. It was only sensible for me to use my resources to ensure my daughter’s safety.

“No,” Jacob said, much to my surprise.

My hackles rose. “I’m her father, and I remain responsible for my daughter’s safety whether she is married to you or not.”

No,” he repeated.

Frustrated, I let it go. Jacob would come around after reflecting on my offer. I was sure of it.

Days later, when Renesmee came to see Carlisle for a checkup, I broached the subject again. Jacob and I ventured into the woods outside the hearing range of Renesmee and the others.

“Jacob, you know Renesmee’s safety is my main concern. If you aren’t interested in the Guardian and want the full shopping experience, then I will compile a list of acceptable vehicles and let you choose.” Seemed reasonable to me.

“No!”

I watched as hot blood flooded Jacob’s face, causing his carotid artery to pulse seductively. Though tainted by dog, the scent burned my throat and for a fraction of a second—

“Have I ever done anything that would bring harm to Renesmee?”

I stepped back. Clearly, I was way overdue for a hunt. “Of course not.”

“Then back off and let me handle this. No offense, but it’s my job to provide for my wife. She’s okay with that, and you should be too.”

“Jacob, vehicles available at the average car dealership are no safer than the Audi. This is not a time for pride.”

“Sure, sure,” he replied, crossing his arms over his chest.

Patronizing me. I clenched my teeth and bit my tongue. I could have ended the argument so easily, but my daughter might suffer over the mongrel’s untimely demise.

A couple days later, after returning from that much-needed hunting trip, I overheard Carlisle talking on the phone.

“...that is understandable. Emmett is more than happy to lend you his Jeep in the meantime.”

Jacob had refused my offers of assistance, but was accepting help from my father and brother?! I admit it hurt my feelings. I would have gladly lent him my Volvo if he’d asked.

He had his reasons, as it turned out. The Jeep was rugged enough to handle the crummy reservation roads and mountain trails better than the vehicle options I had offered him. Unlike nearby tribes who operate casinos, the Quileute don't have the money for expensive roadwork. Proudful Indian that he is, Jacob didn't explain that, of course. I had to read it in his mind in an unguarded moment.

Once I understood, I called Sam Uley immediately, and offered to pay for repaving the roadways throughout the area.

"That's excessive, Cullen, and unnecessary. Thank you, but no." He contacted me later that night and reiterated his position to warn me against taking matters into my own hands. "Any attempt to follow through with your offer will likely strain our mutual kinship and be highly...unwelcome." The Quileute elders had taken offense, it seemed.

Word travels quickly on the reservation. Renesmee called her mother, and Bella confronted me the next day. "He only wants what's best for her within his means. Remember how desperate you were to protect me and how much trouble it caused between you and Charlie? How you always believed you knew what was right? That's a lot like this situation, don't you think?" Apparently, I'd angered her too, because she didn't stop there. The words "controlling bipolar vampire" might have been uttered.

Isn't there a rule amongst humans that "Father knows best?" I wanted what was best for Nessie and that meant the safest vehicle possible. There was no room for compromise on that point, as I reminded my son-in-law at every opportunity. The Jeep was fine for short-term use, but it wasn't designed for safety. A roll bar couldn't hold a candle to armor plating.

Then out of the blue, Renesmee announced that she would no longer speak to me until I "grew up." I was stunned and utterly baffled.

It was Emmett, finally, who enlightened me. "You're stressing everybody out, bro. You're toxic. Why do you think Jasper's been avoiding you?"

"What do you mean? What did I do?"

"Jasper says it's fear. Ever since the accident. You've got to let it go."

"Fear?"

"You know it's true. You're scared about Renesmee getting hurt again. Why else would you make such a stink over what car she drives? Alice is ready to bury you in concrete until 'Carmageddon' is over." He laughed, though I thought the remark less than humorous.

I considered what he'd said. Was this my life's lesson repeating itself? That I, Edward Cullen, do not always know what's best? How many times had I failed Bella while insisting I was right? In truth... many.

I called Jacob the following day with one final proposal. If he rejected it, I would resign myself to Nessie's driving a—God help me!—economy car. Or a muscle car. I only prayed it wouldn't be a Chevrolet.

My daughter answered the phone. "Are you calling to apologize to Jacob?"

"No, actually, I was calling to—"

"Daddy dearest, do you want to know what I think?"

"Of course, Renesmee."

"I'm offended...no...embarrassed by your behavior. You're being stubborn. Immature, even. You're skulking around behind my back, behind Mother's back, trying to control how I live my life. I don't like

being kept in the dark, nor do I appreciate the lack of respect you've shown toward Jacob. I won't tolerate it anymore."

I was mortified. She was right. Not once had I talked things over with her. My intentions, however well-meaning, had only insulted her and divided the family.

After a lengthy conversation, during which I apologized profusely and listened with rapt attention to all she had to say, I explained what I had kept to myself so long, how terrified I was of losing her.

"Daddy, I share your concerns. I really do. I was there when it happened; I struggled to recover. I have no desire to go through that again."

I saw my opening. "Then, please, consider this offer. It'll be the last one, I promise. You and Jacob choose your vehicle, then let me add safety modifications to it. It will still be your choice, whatever you want, only a little safer in the end."

Much to my relief, Renesmee agreed. After Jacob bought the car, I set Rosalie to work on it. She added a rechargeable battery backup and solar-powered controls so Nessie wouldn't run out of gas and get stranded on the side of the road. She also put in advanced regenerative braking and magnetic distance guidance systems to improve the car's steering and stopping ability, and reduce the risk of collision.

When work on the vehicle was complete, Nessie invited us to the reservation for a long overdue visit. Bella and I pulled up to the little white house, and there in the driveway was the vehicle which had caused so much trouble—a moss green Dodge Reisdende, a small, but functional family car. It was not new, but with the modifications it would be safe and dependable. More importantly, Renesmee had chosen the car and she loved it.

Then I did the right thing. I swallowed my pride and approached Jacob with my hand outstretched. "Sorry, Jacob. Renesmee and Bella were right. I was out of line."

He laughed and whacked me on the back. "We both were. You didn't think you were the only one in the doghouse, did you?"

When Renesmee smiled and said, "I love you, Daddy," I'd never felt more ashamed or more blessed. After all my years on this earth, I still have many things to learn. This time the lesson was that "husband" supersedes "father" the moment a daughter says "I do."

When Grandpa Charlie heard about the new car, he sighed with relief. "Thank heavens, it's not a motorcycle."

I couldn't have agreed more.

Edward

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