

## Silent Screams

Renesmee's pregnancy proceeded smoothly, or relatively so, after the surgery. The continual turning of the expansion screws caused her tremendous pain, but I was the only one who knew how much, as she never complained. She wouldn't let Jacob see the hardware attached to her body, knowing it would hurt him since he'd put her in the position to require it. She's a far better person than me, for ten years on, I still struggle not to blame Jacob Black for what my daughter has been through. On the other hand, he gave me my Bella and now our Sarabel, and for both, I shall be forever in his debt.

At fourteen weeks, I began to hear the baby's developing mind, which was of endless fascination to her parents, and I spent many hours over many days answering their questions—"How does she feel now? Is she happy, scared, aware, asleep...?" and so on, *ad infinitum*. It was the least I could do for my daughter and son-in-law during this trying period, though I feared deepening their pain if the outcome of the event wasn't what we hoped for.

In spite of Nessie's kind precautions—concealing the scientifically intriguing, though no doubt horrifying, condition of her torso from her husband—Jacob knew how Renesmee was suffering. He loved her, was attached to her in a way unknowable to all but his like-blooded compatriots, and there came a time when he simply could no longer tolerate his wife's torture. He pleaded with her to allow Carlisle to deliver their child, for better or worse.

We believed Sarabel would be viable outside the womb, but at only four months gestation, even Carlisle couldn't know for sure. Renesmee must have sensed the truth in it, though, because she agreed, thereby setting the process in motion. Of course, we would do

everything in our power to ensure Nessie's suffering wouldn't be for nought, that Sarabel would survive.

The delivery was nightmarish. At least the previous surgery had been a controlled process, and, though horrific, as predictable as any such procedure can be. In contrast, the birth turned into almost pure improvisation.

The easiest way to deliver the child would have been to cut the remaining stripe of skin down Renesmee's belly and pull the baby out, but even with Carlisle's skill, it was simply too dangerous to aim a saw in the direction of the nearly full-term fetus. The truth was, we didn't know the nature of her biology—like Renesmee, Sarabel would prove a journey of discovery.

To protect the fetus, Carlisle would employ the obstetric surgeon's contingency plan—the episiotomy—cutting Renesmee's inflexible perineum with the diamond-tipped saw to allow the child to be born more or less naturally. After all, except for her nearly impermeable exterior, Renesmee is anatomically very human. What Carlisle never could have foreseen, though, was the slight variation in her circulatory system—possibly altered by the pregnancy—that made his plan a deadly one.

To make up for her spectacular failure to help birth Nessie, Rosalie took point position as Carlisle's assistant. She was, by then, a full-fledged combination medical doctor/canine veterinarian in her own right, though her hands-on experience consisted of nursing Renesmee and minimally assisting with the occasional wolf in Carlisle's care over the years.

Sue Clearwater Swan made herself available after sending Charlie to Billy's house where grandfather- and great grandfather-to-be could support one another through what promised to be an ordeal for everyone. Leah Clearwater, who has always cared for Nessie despite her distrust of vampires, took on the job of "radio." She

remained on the scene in wolf form and communicated the progress of Sarabel's birth to Jacob and the pack, who took up residence in the Olympic National Forest. Nessie insisted her husband stay far enough away that he wouldn't be tempted to interfere if the going got rough.

Sarabel was to be born at Jacob and Nessie's cottage to make the experience as comfortable for the mother as possible under the circumstances. It wasn't much consolation, but there no other was to be had. With the life of a hereditary tribal chief potentially at stake, the entire Quileute Nation convened on the reservation to mark the occasion and to keep watch. Mournful (to my ears) singing and drumming could be heard for miles around throughout the day.

Carlisle induced labor using a combination of human hormones and manual methods, and the birth began. When the baby crowned, Nessie bravely bit down on the Kevlar-covered madrona branch as Carlisle's saw bit into one of the most sensitive areas of a human's body.

This time, perhaps because the stakes of the surgery and the accompanying emotion were so much higher than on the previous occasion, Nessie could not contain her distress. At his wife's first unrestrained cry, Jacob bolted through the forest, leaving his pack behind as he raced headlong toward home.

Leah stood guard outside, too proud to ask for help, and she proved no match for the powerful wolf that barreled over her or even for the human edifice Jacob subsequently transformed into. Without regard for his nudity, the gathered company, or any other distractions, he booted Leah aside and stormed through the cottage door, intent on annihilating Nessie's torturer—my father—as he presided over the delivery.

Rosalie reacted instantly, taking unabashed delight in punching Jacob in the face and knocking him backward off his feet.

He sprang up to charge her, and she followed with a well-aimed kick to the ribs, which sent him flying from the house. By then, the pack had arrived and took control, carting away their crumpled leader as his broken bones began to mend. I daresay my son-in-law was lucky my spiteful sister didn't aim a little lower and destroy his ability to reproduce forever. I might have tried it myself.

Thankfully, the required incision was short, and when the saw's whining ceased, Nessie managed to regain control and suppress her cries. Her silence helped Jacob to calm enough that the pack was able to bully and cajole him back into the forest.

Like Jacob, I'd been pressured to stay away. Bella, Carlisle, and Esme urged me to avoid the visceral experience of another traumatic family birth, arguing that Rosalie was perfectly suited to assist this time around. Because Bella insisted on being there for Nessie, I let them convince me I wasn't required in situ.

Without a need to be present, I was not given permission to come onto the reservation, so I waited in restless anticipation just across the boundary as the procedure began. I was too far away to hear the delivery room conversation, but close enough to read the participants' thoughts. This uncomfortable compromise made me acutely aware that in the midst of her extreme duress, my noble and heroic child tried (unsuccessfully) to shield her mind-reading father from her pain and terror.

Seth Clearwater kindly joined me in my vigil and, I daresay, was as worried and anxious as myself. Never in my long life have I felt more cowardly as I huddled there, protected from an event that my precious family members experienced to the utmost degree.

Once Carlisle made the cuts and retained Nessie's tissues with steel braces, the birth proceeded much as a full-blooded human's would have. Sarabel's head crowned and she began to emerge slowly from the womb.

*With vampires on hand to hear the baby's heartbeat, no one felt the need for me to monitor her mind throughout the birth, but as the widest part of her head began to emerge, I heard the baby panic and knew with certainty that something had gone seriously wrong. Instantly, I broke my promise to stay away and sprinted onto the reservation, shouting to Seth over my shoulder, "The baby's in distress!" I was also violating our treaty agreement with the Quileute that no Cullen would come onto their land without prior approval. (Permission was graciously granted after the fact when Seth relayed the reason to Leah, and word was sent to Sam Uley.)*

*As I ran at top speed toward Nessie and Jake's cabin, I heard the silent drama of the birthing room. Carlisle was attempting to communicate to Rosalie the seriousness of the situation without alarming Renesmee or Bella. Sarabel was stuck, her oxygen supply compromised, and her heart would soon falter. What drove me on, though, was the unbridled, primitive terror of the helpless creature who can neither understand its suffering nor has the means to remedy it. Except this was my granddaughter and, suddenly, I was more than attached to this child—I was desperate for her to survive.*

*The emergency called for action and my father took it appropriately by reengaging the saw to widen the mother's birth canal. Only then, when the blade had just begun to bite, did he discover Renesmee's fateful anatomical variance which sent the whole plan, and all our hopes and dreams, skittering out of control. The blood supply to Nessie's womb had extended into her external organs and at the second touch of the saw, blood poured out of her like water. A major, unseen artery gushed forth so profusely that if my daughter had been fully human, she'd not have survived more than a couple of minutes.*

*We didn't know what would happen if Renesmee were completely drained of blood. Would our immortal daughter perish? One thing was certain, though—her baby would. Sarabel had to be delivered*

immediately. Torn between rushing to save the child and protecting the mother from even more damage, any doctor might have faltered.

Renesmee, for her part, grasped the situation and, just as her mother had done nearly fifteen years before, began to scream, "Get her out! Get her out! Get her out! Get her out!" Her chilling refrain continued, growing weaker, as brave, bold Nessie quickly lost her strength.

Much to her great shame, though no one blamed her but she herself, Bella was overcome by her youthful vampire nature and had to escape the room. There was so much blood, just... so... much. And though the blood was Nessie's, never an undue temptation to her mother, combined with Sarabel's birdlike, fluttering heart and the overwhelming stress of the situation, Bella had to bail out and run. I could not go to her. I could not comfort her. I could only propel myself to that chamber of looming death, where the ancestral line I'd never expected to seed faded fast before my eyes.

Jacob beat me there. Despite the pain of his mending bones, when he heard Renesmee's desperate pleas, Jake broke from the pack and tore through the woods toward home, mowing down everything in his path. This time he vaulted over Leah's head, phased to human in midair, and charged into the heart of the nightmare.

It was then that I recognized the playing out of Alice's long-ago vision, only we'd read the scene all wrong. Carlisle wasn't a helpless bystander to the crisis. In that captured moment, he was the only one left to manage it. When Jacob thundered in, Nessie was insensible, Bella had fled, Rosalie was retrieving blood for transfusions, and Sue had gone to warn Sam of my incursion onto the reservation.

Jacob's mind reeled as he entered the room, and I feared for my father's safety. I would never get there in time. Then, to my great

relief, the wolf's humanity overcame him at the sight of his beloved lying helpless in a pool of her own blood. He recoiled and convulsed, and was forced from the delivery room by a weak stomach. And just as in the vision, I burst in to find Carlisle immobile at the foot of the bed, the infant trapped and dying, the mother set to succumb. With the fate of his descendants hovering in the balance, the esteemed Dr. Cullen, as capable and experienced a surgeon as there ever was, had hesitated for the briefest moment. Not even the ablest of us was immune.

Returning then with a stockpile of human blood, Rosalie rapidly assessed the situation and snatched our decision away. In spite of her love for Renesmee, my sister's foremost concern was now, as it had always been, to save the life of the child. She darted forward and deliberately, even cruelly, jammed her hand into my daughter's body and cupped the baby's vulnerable head with her palm. Then with the full strength of an agitated vampire, she flexed her fingers outward, piercing the taut silence with the metallic screech of Renesmee's tearing flesh and the harrowing crunch of my daughter's pelvis.

With the deadly restriction removed, Sarabel fairly flew from Nessie's body right into Rosalie's arms. With single-minded authority and little regard for convention, my sister severed the umbilical cord with her teeth and spirited the baby away. Sarabel could be in no better hands with Rosalie as both her defender and warden, but the child's mother lay in tatters before us, barely alive.

"Edward!"

My father's voice cut through the fog of my panic. I had turned to stone, immobilized by the horror of the spectacle before me. Do vampires suffer post-traumatic stress? I have come to accept that I, at least, am capable of that great human weakness, for I was lost in the terror of my daughter's birth at the moment of her daughter's birth.

*“Son, you must pull yourself together if we’re going to save Nessie’s life. I can’t manage it alone.”*

*Shocked into animation by Carlisle’s words, I rushed over to help. As he located gauze to stem the flow of blood, I reached to pinch off the dangling umbilical cord where blood must be pouring forth.*

*But it wasn’t. It took my befuddled mind a second to realize why not, and suddenly, I knew what was required to resolve the crisis.*

*“Venom.”*

*My father caught my meaning.*

*I try not to think on the psychosexual implications of saving my daughter’s life by applying my own venom to the great wounds in the most intimate area of her body. It’s a moment when I might have wished for my wife’s succor, but she had done all she could manage.*

*For want of a faster solution, I kneeled between my inanimate child’s legs and spit into the bloody gap of her body, using my fingers to spread venom as far and wide as I could. One major artery had been cut, but we couldn’t know what other hidden faucets had been opened. By the looks of the blood pool, there could have been several.*

*It only occurred to me in the aftermath of the trauma that years earlier we had worried ourselves sick over the danger of changing Renesmee when we thought her lifespan was limited. In that catastrophic moment, I simply acted, introducing a large amount of potentially fatal venom into Nessie’s bloodstream.*

*I thank whatever being watches over us—if one is there at all—that in my haste to save my daughter, I did not end her life. The venom, in fact, had no effect except to seal her wounds. Since that*

*time, we have come to believe that Renesmee can never be changed, but neither can she die.*

*Jacob is forever haunted by the sound of Nessie screaming for her daughter's life and the gradual quieting of the sound as her own life force drained away. What he shall never know, what I shall never tell him, is that she was always there—through the sawing, the tearing, and the bone-crushing torment. She kept silent to protect him, but she could not protect me. I alone heard her silent screaming.*

*Edward*

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