

REUNION

Alice, Bella, and I are coming up on our fifth-year class reunion in the spring. Actually, it will be our sixth, but the planners—Jessica Stanley and Lauren Mallory—didn't get their act together until year six. Who does five-year reunions, anyway? We've barely escaped from Forks High School and people want to get back together? How much can humans possibly have changed in five years?

We haven't changed and that's a fact. Bella will always be as beautiful as she was on our wedding day. Our classmates might be interested to know that Bella and I have a fifteen-year-old daughter, sort of. The details of how we managed that will remain forever a mystery. At our wedding, Jessica Stanley eagerly whispered to anyone who would listen that Bella was "expecting," though that's not precisely the wording she used. I can tell her this—we were expecting a lot and hoping for more, but we weren't expecting Renesmee.

I'm not sure why Bella wants to go to this reunion, but she does. Carlisle hasn't said "no" to his newest vampire daughter—he rarely does to any of us—but he is skeptical. Alice is sure to get on the bandwagon, though, if it means a party. Actually, I'll go out on a limb and predict that Alice will offer our house as a party venue and then hijack the entire planning process. Our class reunion will turn into a 1950s sock-hop with poodle skirts and fuzzy sweaters for the women and rolled-up trouser cuffs and ducktail haircuts for the men. Actually, it could work out fine regardless of the theme if she designs the lighting. Alice no doubt would work some kind of magic to age us all by exactly six years.

Our family has been in Forks for ten years now which is pushing the outermost edge of credibility, and we still haven't found a way to leave the community. As she will tell you should you be foolish enough to ask, Rosalie is sick to death of wearing her beautiful golden locks in a granny bun to make her appear older. Esme has considered spreading the rumor

that Carlisle has had a facelift, but he might not be able to make that believable working at a hospital as he does. At the very least, he'd have to "go away" for a couple of months.

Bella and I stayed away from town for Renesmee's first four years and pretended to be at Dartmouth. Now that Nessie has nearly reached her adult size, we could introduce her to the townspeople as our adopted niece and that would give her seven or eight more years in Forks. But there's no getting around the fact that Bella and I look exactly as we did six years ago, except that Bella has paler skin and amber-colored eyes.

We can alter our style of dress to make us appear more mature and if absolutely necessary, we can use stage make-up and hair dye to give us the appearance of aging, but those techniques are not particularly convincing, in truth. Makeup sticks to our skin no better than dirt does and Rosalie, the only one of us who ever wears it, has to keep tissues always on hand to dab at the smears. Carlisle is thinking of moving his medical practice to Port Angeles or Olympia where no one knows how old he is and where he could work under surgical lights without wearing aging makeup, which looks especially false when brightly lit.

I tend to think of Bella and myself as looking older than we do because of all that we've been through in the last five years, both good and bad—deadly standoffs with vampire covens and wolf packs, marriage, a life-threatening pregnancy, and raising our unusual daughter. However, if I examine Bella's photographs of me from our courtship days, I have to admit that any change is unlikely to be visible to anyone but me.

In spite of the difficulties of staying put, Bella isn't ready to leave her father and we are both reluctant to make Renesmee move. Being near La Push allows her to go to school on the reservation where she doesn't have to hide who or what she is. She'll get enough of that in adulthood. In actuality, she's outpaced the high school teachers and could be working at a college graduate level, but Bella wants to let her be a teenager for as long as possible.

Needless to say, Jacob Black is strongly resistant to our moving even as far as Port Angeles. He doesn't want to be separated from Renesmee and he can't abandon his duties on the reservation as pack leader. It has occurred to me that Nessie might choose to stay in La Push when we leave western Washington. Bella can't even talk about that possibility without completely falling apart. My feeling is that Renesmee still has free will and who she chooses for her mate in twenty or thirty years is not a foregone conclusion. (I know, I know... a father's wishful thinking.)

But back to the reunion... Jessica sent Bella's "save-the-date" announcement to Charlie who passed it along and it included notices for Alice and me too. Not that Jessica necessarily wants to invite Alice or me, but she knows that we're Bella's family now and she can hardly avoid it. Possibly, she'll want to check on the status of Bella's and my marriage, assuming she hasn't changed much in six years. Apparently, Port Angeles isn't the dating mecca that she thought it would be when she moved there. I have heard that Eric Yorkie is back from college and still available, though.

From what Alice tells me, Jessica and Lauren went off to southern California together after graduation. Lauren thought she had what it takes to be a model or actress in L.A., and Jessica went along to escape from Forks and find a rich, handsome husband. Jessica didn't last long in the city. By all accounts, she disliked waiting tables and hated being considered a "plain Jane" among the multitudes of plasticized, bleached blondes (including Lauren). She bailed out and returned to Forks six months later and Mike Newton proposed to her soon afterwards.

Of course, everybody knows what happened to the ill-fated couple. Jessica began working at the Newtons' store (in Bella's former position) and quickly discovered how ordinary and dead-end a life in Forks could be. Mike had felt obligated to drop out of college a couple of months into his first semester and take over as manager of the family store after his father died. He hates his life, especially the fact that he is still being bossed around both at home and at work by his domineering mother.

Mrs. Newton threw a fit when Mike and Jessica announced that they were renting an apartment and moving in together. According to Bella, who found out through emails from Angela, Jessica couldn't stand Mrs. Newton's influence over Mike and was heard at least once referring to him as a "momma's boy." She broke off the engagement and moved out one day when Mike was at work. She went to Port Angeles and took a job as a barmaid. Now Mike has grown as stout as a barrel from spending every night in Port Angeles taverns looking for Jessica and drowning his sorrows in micro-brew. It's sad, really—or so Bella tells Alice. It's not of much interest to me since I was never especially fond of either of them.

Bella secretly enjoyed hearing that Lauren—who was so mean to her in high school—hasn't exactly fulfilled her dreams of success in Hollywood. Jessica told Angela that Lauren is making extremely good money working for tips as an "exotic dancer" on the Sunset Strip. Who knows, maybe she'll be the next Anna Nicole Smith and find herself an old billionaire to love.

Ben Cheney and Angela Weber are engaged and living together in Seattle. Ben graduated a year early from the UW's computer engineering program and is making a success of himself as a graduate student doing research on the next-generation of video gaming software. Angela got a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and is becoming known for her talent with watercolors. She paints Pacific Northwest scenes and sells her work at various street fairs and art shows in several states. We have two beautiful pictures hanging in our cottage—one of a tree-sized piece of driftwood on First Beach and one of a mossy seat on a downed tree in the Olympic National Forest.

Edward

