

ALL GROWN UP

With Renesmee's abrupt vault into the world of adulthood, my mind harkens back to the days before Renesmee's coming of age when she was still an innocent child discovering the mysteries of the universe, including the miracle of procreation.

"Bobby Fischer had kitties!" Renesmee had hollered as she raced into the house one spring day when she was one-and-a-half years old. Her "Uncle" Embry, as she called him then, had told her that Bobby Fischer was a male cat and none of the adults had bothered to double-check that assumption.

Bobby Fischer bore four kittens—two males, two females—by some unknown tomcat and Renesmee named them after her favorite pioneers in the fields of mathematics and computing: Charles Babbage, Alan Turing, Ada Lovelace, and Admiral Grace Hopper.

Bella and I took the opportunity to teach Renesmee about mammalian reproduction and we took a Wikipedia lesson ourselves on sexing a kitten to prevent another such surprise in the future. Bobby Fischer was rechristened Bobbi Fischer. Renesmee herself farmed the kittens out to her friends at the reservation school, very carefully explaining the differences between the boys and the girls to her gift recipients and how boy kitties inject sperm into girl kitties to make more kitties.

So we had come a long way from those days. Renesmee had grown into a lovely, apparently fertile woman with the healthy sex drive of her mother. After her announcement that she wanted to try out sex, I took her on a private hunt to share with her my personal values surrounding sex, commitment, love, and marriage. Carlisle, Esme, and I are the last Cullen holdouts for a value system that advocates celibacy before marriage. It isn't a popular idea and even Renesmee's mother has deep reservations about its viability in the twenty-first century, but I still thought Renesmee should hear her father's archaic point-of-view.

“When your mother and I were courting,” I told her, “I insisted on abstaining from sex until after we were married.”

“I know,” she replied with a smirk. “Mom told me.”

“Well, perhaps she also told you that she didn’t share my viewpoint. Her parents were married barely long enough for them to have her before they got divorced, so she never developed much respect for the institution of marriage. I was raised to believe that having sex outside of marriage is wrong—a sin in God’s eyes—and maybe that’s true, but that’s not why I recommend against it. Experience has proven to me that the union of two bodies finds its greatest expression as an extension of the union of two souls.”

Renesmee remained silent, but I knew she was listening carefully. I went on. “In retrospect, I think your mother found that to be more true than she anticipated. Sex as an expression of love and commitment is a profound experience and elevates the act to something more than a bodily function. I’m glad that we waited. Making love with your mother on our wedding night was worth all the arguments I had with her about it beforehand.”

*Renesmee did not poke her fingers in her ears and say *Ooh, gross, Dad! Don’t talk about you and Mom having sex!* She’s a more thoughtful person than that and she was considering my position.*

“You’re trying to not tell me what to do, aren’t you, Dad?” she confirmed.

“That’s right, daughter.” I smiled at her. “I respect your ability to make your own decision, but at least I wanted to share my perspective with you. Your grandparents and I are the holdouts on the old-fashioned viewpoint, though it sounds like Jacob is setting some constraints—which I agree with, by the way, as far as they go.”

Nessie giggled. “Yes, it’s really funny.” She switched into her silent communication mode in case any wolves were in the vicinity. Zafrina had indeed taught her to communicate without the need to touch her recipient as long as he or she was close by. Her mother and I were the best receivers, though I couldn’t always tell if I was receiving or just mindreading. She

had only partial success with the rest of the family and continued to work on the skill.

Silently, she went on, *Embry told me that Jacob was really hot-to-trot when he was dating mom! She giggled again.*

“You find that amusing do you?” I responded, feeling the corner of my mouth twitch up slightly. I had never found it amusing, but I did find my daughter’s amusement amusing. I was glad she could take it so lightly.

Nessie went on. *Oh...it’s hilarious! Mom didn’t want to have sex with Jake but I do and he tells ME no!*

I chuckled. “To be clear, your mother says they never officially dated, that they were just friends.”

Well, I heard he gave you a pretty good run for your money! she relayed silently, smirking.

A stab of pain cut through me as I remembered the horrific night when Bella finally recognized that she loved Jacob and then had let him go.

“Who told you that?” I asked, perhaps a bit more sharply than I intended. I reigned my emotion in.

Uncle Billy, Renesmee replied.

“Hmm...well...he’s probably right. Does that bother you?”

No, I wasn’t around to be bothered by it then and now it’s in the past. Jake reminds me all the time that the past is the past. He really loves me, Dad.

I stopped running and Renesmee followed suit. It seemed like an important moment. I regarded her carefully.

“I know he does, Nessie. How do you feel about that?”

Oh, I love him too. He could hardly be more perfect.

I chuckled at her comment. She hadn’t known Jacob as long as I had. But he was different now. He was devoted to Nessie—and only Nessie. “Do you know what you’re going to do?” I asked.

Nessie sighed and rolled her eyes. *I suppose I'll have to marry him if I ever want to get laid.* She sighed again heavily as if suffering a great ordeal. Then she glanced up at me through her eyelashes and started laughing. "Ha, ha, ha! You should see the look on your face, Dad!"

I was glad at that moment that I could not blush. She was trying to wind me up and was succeeding as only Nessie could.

You know, all the girls on the rez think you're really hot. My daughter was on a roll now, trying to get my goat as she often did when she thought I was being too serious.

"Well, Renesmee," I replied with a straight face, "that's just one of the great burdens of being me."

She stared at me, trying to determine whether I was joking. I waited a beat and then grinned at her and she laughed.

"In all seriousness, though, Jacob asked me six months ago if he could officially become engaged to you," I told her.

He did?

"He did and I said no. I told him to wait another year, but that I preferred it was your idea rather than his. He was still a lot older than you last year."

But now he's not.

"No. You must be very nearly the same age and it's no longer up to me and your mom to tell Jacob yes or no. That's between you two now."

I'm not that crazy about the idea of marriage, to be honest, Nessie confided. It seems like such an outdated notion. It's not like I'm ever going to want anybody else.

I suppressed my surprise at her last statement. I hadn't known she felt that way. Then I said, "Marriage isn't outdated to me. Besides the day you were born, your Mom's and my wedding day was the single most important day of my life. Making a vow to love, cherish, and support someone for as

long as you live is a profound act. There is great value in formalizing and stating your intentions toward one another.”

I know, Dad. I just don't feel in any hurry to get there. I know there will never be anyone else for me except Jake, but I hate to be a foregone conclusion. It's so predictable.

“Believe me, child. Jacob has never regarded you as a foregone conclusion. From the time he helped bring you into this world, he's fought for you every day of your life, against me as much as anything else.”

You haven't made it easy for him, have you?

“No. I wanted you to have the chance to choose for yourself—to have options.”

I don't need any other options. It was always going to be Jacob.

“How long have you known?” I asked, astonished.

Oh...forever, really. Jacob's mine. I've always known that. It's only recently that I've started seeing him in a different way, though. I don't think he's caught up with me on that yet.

Much to my surprise, Renesmee blushed slightly. She didn't have to explain to me what she meant.

“I see.”

So I'm going to propose to him, Dad. Do I have your blessing?

I stared at my daughter in amazement. Her unpredictability reminded me so much of her mother. I never knew which way her thoughts were heading, but I could see that she was absolutely serious about this.

She continued. I wanted to do things the traditional way and ask for the bride's father's permission before I proposed.

Nessie grinned and I began to laugh. Love surged through me in a great wave. I reached for her and pulled her into my arms, kissing the top of her head—my beautiful, brilliant, singular daughter whom I love more than life itself.

“Of course you have my permission, darling child, and my blessing. Jacob Black will make you a fine husband.” I kissed her head again and added solemnly, “But you might want to ask his father for the gentleman’s hand.”

She leaned back to search my face, then burst into giggles. I chuckled with her as we resumed our jaunt through the forest, intermittently nudging each other off balance as we ran.

Edward

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