

APPROPRIATING FRED

When Fred arrived in Denali, he crept around the coven house without announcing himself, much as he had done when he first visited our house. Carlisle had called Tanya to inform her that Fred would be visiting, but he gave her no particular time frame, so Fred was not discovered immediately.

Eleazar was the first to notice Fred's presence. With his ability to recognize the talents other vampires possess, he began to sense that a powerful shield was operating nearby. At first, he attributed the force field to Kate, who had been working continually to extend the range and strength of her shield since the Volturi's attack on her sister had left her feeling aggrieved and vulnerable.

Once Eleazar determined that it was not Kate's shield he was sensing, but a second one, he recalled Carlisle's comment that the vampire Fred had an "interesting" talent, which he had declined to identify, leaving Eleazar to discover it for himself. Eleazar had never met a vampire with an invisibility shield and was impressed by its effectiveness. He called out to the visitor.

"Hello! Might you be a friend of Carlisle Cullen? Is your name Fred?"

Knowing he had been found out, Fred lowered his shield and allowed Eleazar to approach him. As Eleazar tells it, he then had to play twenty questions to verify who Fred was and what his intentions were in visiting. Carmen, always warmly welcoming, coaxed him to come inside where Eleazar introduced him to the rest of coven.

Eleazar said that Fred was wary, but the women couldn't keep their eyes off his blonde hair, chiseled face, and broad shoulders. He stood, awkwardly silent, as they scrutinized him and tried to make conversation. When he got too uncomfortable, Fred raised his shield

and became invisible, though he continued to respond to direct questions. Everyone was in awe.

Fred began to hang around the Denali's house during the day, though often hiding behind his shield so that Eleazar was the only one who knew for sure when he was there and when he wasn't. He was intrigued enough to remain nearby, but living with the group was too difficult, not only because of his character quirk, but also because his first experience with coven life had been so nightmarish.

Once Fred became tolerably comfortable with the Denalis, Eleazar began telling him of our history, of the Volturi, and of other vampires who have talents both similar to, and different from, his. Eleazar tested the limits of Fred's shield and encouraged him to practice extending it as Bella learned to do.

Eleazar was greatly amused when Fred demonstrated the first manifestation of his talent—the stink shield. Eleazar also marveled at Fred's ability to make others forget that they had seen him or that he had ever been present. The latter was a subtle effect but, as Eleazar told him, would be extremely powerful in helping him to avoid capture by the Volturi. Eleazar told Carlisle later that Fred was one of the most gifted vampires he had ever met, a savant. Right up there in Alice's league.

True to her nature of chasing those who can't be caught, Tanya grew enamored of Fred. She began following him when he left the coven house, inviting herself to tag along wherever he was going. Fred froze into immobility every time she approached, but she was so attracted to him that his reticence and lack of positive response didn't deter her. (In fact, that was probably part of the attraction.)

When Tanya sets her sights on something she wants, she can be relentless. In Fred's case, she believed that persistence would bring him around. After a time, she escalated her attentions from chatting and shadowing him, to touching his shoulder flirtatiously,

giving him pecks on the cheek, and frequently crowding his personal space.

Tanya's attentions could not have been completely unwelcome, because Fred didn't purposefully hide from her or cause her to forget he was around, which he could have done at any time. Tanya never would have found him if he hadn't wanted to be found. Though he might have appeared unenthusiastic, his behavior was actually receptive—for Fred.

Fred was three years older than me when Victoria changed him, a crucial developmental difference between us given the social conservatism of my time. Even if he had never gained experience with the opposite sex, Fred was old enough to have developed sexual desires and he was capable of being attracted to Tanya as a beautiful and available female. Her pursuit may have resonated with him in a way that it never did with me.

Tanya's breakthrough with Fred occurred on a hunting trip. As she had done with me, Tanya offered Fred the intriguing possibility of locating polar bears. She assured him that it was the best-tasting blood a vegetarian could drink.

"I like pussycats," was Fred's reply.

Tanya looked at him curiously. As Eleazar had hinted to Carlisle in a phone conversation, Tanya construed Fred's natural taciturnity as depth. In truth, Fred is as straightforward and literal as a punch to the nose. When he says, "I like pussycats," that's exactly what he means—no more, no less.

After a long journey and a successful polar bear hunt, Fred and Tanya began the trek back to the coven house. Along the way, Tanya paused at the same granite outcropping where she and I had stopped and asked Fred to sit with her. I don't doubt that Fred wondered why since he's no conversationalist and neither of them had a need to rest.

“I’ve grown quite fond of you, Fred,” Tanya said as they sat together on a boulder.

How does a mildly autistic vampire respond to a comment like that? He raises his shield. (Not his stink shield because he doesn’t want to drive Tanya away. He merely wants to hide.)

“Stop that, Fred,” Tanya scolded. “You’re gorgeous and I want to look at you.”

Fred reappears, but fades in and out as his discomfort waxes and wanes. Tanya scoots close to him and wraps her arm around his waist. He freezes into a column of ice. A human with Asperger’s Syndrome normally doesn’t respond well to direct physical contact and our experience with Fred tells us that, as a vampire, that trait is solidified.

I can guess his thoughts... Why is she touching me? I hate this. Should I pull away? Repel her?

“Fred,” Tanya coaxed, “look at me.”

Fred turns his head stiffly and Tanya leans in to kiss him on the lips, an invitation rather than an exploration. Fred does not kiss back, but neither does he turn away. He stares at her face, trying to understand her motivation, which is a complete mystery to him. Fred has not kissed a woman since he became a vampire and doesn’t remember ever being kissed as a human.

“Don’t you want to kiss me?” she asks.

“Why?” Fred asks in turn. It’s not a coy response. He is actually curious.

“Because I like you. Do you like me, Fred?”

“You’re very pretty. I like your hair.” Not exactly a rousing statement of overwhelming passion, but that’s about the extent of Fred’s capacity for such things.

Not one to be put off easily when pursuing a man, Tanya runs her fingers through Fred’s blonde hair. “I like yours too. Kiss me, Fred.”

Fred doesn’t move, but he doesn’t turn away either and so Tanya takes the lead. She presses her lips to his and this time he isn’t quite as unresponsive, but he’s clearly uncertain about his role and whether he even likes this sort of touching.

“Fred, you’ve never had a woman, have you?”

Fred stares at her.

“A girlfriend,” Tanya clarifies.

“Oh.” Now he gets it. “No. I had a friend named Bree.”

“Did you ever kiss Bree?”

“No. She liked Diego.”

“Do you want to kiss me?”

Fred’s not sure, but he does want to touch her hair and so he does.

“Such an unusual color.”

“It’s called strawberry blonde.”

“It’s pretty.”

“I’m going to teach you how to kiss a woman, Fred. Follow along and do what I do. I promise you will enjoy yourself.”

Fred doesn’t agree or disagree, but when Tanya touches her lips to his for the third time, he hesitantly responds.

“Open your lips to me, Fred,” she tells him and though he wants to ask “Why?” she doesn’t give him a chance. She merely demonstrates the pleasant sensation of passing breath between them.

Fred is not stupid, nor is he ignorant about the mechanics of physical intimacy...up to a point. He grew up watching television and going to movies like any other kid, and though he preferred animation and action movies over “relationship” films, he’s seen couples kiss, fall into bed together, and even simulate sex. More than likely, Fred became curious enough about such things to look up the details in a book. Or perhaps the mechanics of sex were taught in high school. However he was exposed, he was not ignorant in theory, only in practice. As a vampire, he was locked into a state of vague physical longing without any comprehension of an outlet for it.

As a human, even an autistic human if he could tolerate touch at all, Fred naturally would have figured out that the rush of blood between his legs in response to certain stimuli was a sensation to be encouraged. Eventually, he would have pursued it to its natural conclusion. He would have made the neural connection between love, sexual arousal, and consummation.

If a vampire doesn’t already have that connection at the time he is created, though, it is not a straightforward process to gain it afterwards. That’s one reason why so many vampires live out their existence alone, as nomads.

Sensing that touching Fred was not the most effective way to get into his trousers, Tanya took the opposite route. She disrobed and encouraged him to touch each beautiful part of her until the pleasure of doing so began to sear itself into Fred’s consciousness. It was a step-by-step process and one step did not lead naturally to the next. I don’t know at what point Fred’s knowledge of human intimacy and the physical reality of his vampire body finally collided to create that “Ah ha!” experience which changed him

irrevocably, but by the time Tanya had coerced his clothing off and given him the visceral experience of intimate touch, the connection was made.

Over the centuries, Tanya and her sisters had many sexual partners, but their experience, like Johan's, is an aberration among vampires. Because they remained isolated from our kind for so long, they had loved only humans and never experienced the eternal bonding that occurs between vampire lovers.

So while Tanya took Fred's virginity, he also took hers in a way. Having lead Fred from innocence to the searing, boundless sexuality of a vampire, Tanya was changed. I couldn't be happier for her. Perhaps her affinity for virgins had a purpose. Maybe finding one of her own to lead and teach is what she required to attain an eternal bond. Likewise, only someone as pushy and persistent as Tanya ever could have broken through Fred's wall of social isolation.

Edward

