

## WOMANLY WILES

*Given the purpose of my diary—a release valve, of sorts, for all the personal information I glean every day from the minds around me—I’ve not had much reason to write about Bella’s father, because I have never been very successful at reading Charlie’s mind. He is the source of the mental silence which initially spurred my interest in his daughter (a fact that might distress him, given the way everything has turned out). In truth, his quiet mind has prevented me from knowing much more about Charlie than any observant human could discover.*

*One thing I do know about him is that he loves fiercely and, perhaps because a human heart can contain only so much, he loves parsimoniously, having had only two major attachments for most of his life. Charlie’s love for his daughter is the paternal equivalent of my overarching ardor for her and he once loved his wife, Renee, in much the same way. After Renee left him, those who knew Charlie well thought he might never love again. It wasn’t until nearly twenty years had passed that they were proven wrong when his feelings for a dear friend evolved into something more.*

*The romance between Charlie and Sue Clearwater began slowly. Charlie stood by her after Harry’s death and, based on what Bella has told me, grieved nearly as intensely as she did at the loss of her husband, his best friend. The mutual comfort they derived from one another also supported them through the trials of single parenting. Sue had some unspecified difficulty with her children after their father died and Charlie was facing the return of his daughter’s wholly unsuitable beau. The two of them, drawn together by trial and kept close by shared concerns, eventually could not ignore the feelings that began developing between them.*

Perhaps because Sue and Charlie's first foray across the gulf separating friendship and love was such an emotional event for Charlie, I saw his memory of their first awkward kiss. Though I never shared the news with Bella, I was aware that their relationship progressed rather quickly after that. By then, Sue had become a regular visitor at the Cullen home and, unlike Charlie's, her mind was as transparent as glass.

In a show of solidarity and with a misguided notion of protecting Charlie, Sue began accompanying him when he came to our house to visit Bella and Renesmee. Though her aversion to vampires has never changed, Sue's wariness of my family faded somewhat upon repeated exposure. As her extreme vigilance lessened, her mind would wander from the danger we represented to more personal matters, which, much to my surprise, included schemes for getting Charlie Swan into her bed.

Even after she had won his heart and they had shared more than a few kisses, Charlie was not ready to allow Sue access to his body. He was cautious and shy, but she was barely forty years old, in her sexual prime, and she was eager to make love with the man she had grown to love.

During that time, I often had to disguise a chortle as a cough when I caught glimpses of Sue's inventive household "emergencies" – locking herself out of the house, hearing strange sounds in the attic, getting stranded by a dead battery or flat tire—and Charlie's obliviousness to their true meaning. After many fruitless attempts, Sue finally found success by conjuring up a prowler late on a Saturday night.

"Make sure all your doors and windows are locked. I'm on my way!" Charlie bellowed into the phone at 1:00 a.m., only two short hours after he had left her frustrated, unfulfilled, and fully clothed at her door.

*It's curious that Charlie—a veteran police officer—didn't question why his Quileute lady alerted him rather than the tribal police who were closer at hand, or why she didn't call Billy Black, who could have summoned local assistance at a moment's notice. Perhaps his subconscious mind knew the true nature of Sue's distress, for he didn't alert them either. Instead, he assumed responsibility for the call and, in a testosterone-fueled charge, made the fifteen-minute drive to the reservation in seven minutes flat, disturbing citizens along the way with his police siren and flashing lights.*

*Charlie pulled up to Sue's house quietly, lights off, possibly hoping to surprise the sorry so-and-so who had frightened the woman he'd vowed to protect. He opened door of the cruiser, using it as a shield against danger, as he scanned the area, gun drawn. Sue watched him through a crack in the window curtain, his display of masculinity fuel to her flame. Charlie crouched slightly, both arms extended in a sweep of the property before he made his way to her front door and knocked.*

*"Sue, it's me. Are you okay?" he called.*

*The door opened partway and Charlie found Sue Clearwater—an utterly competent woman, a tribal elder, a skilled deer and rabbit hunter, comfortable with a rifle or shotgun—dressed in (desperately?) skimpy nightclothes, wearing a frightened expression.*

*Charlie's eyes widened at the short, silky robe she'd tied carefully around her waist, just loose enough to gap across the top of her breasts and reveal the provocative valley between them. The thin fabric clung to her peaked brown nipples, gone erect from the night's chill breeze and this man's gaze. Charlie had to tear his eyes away from her to concentrate on the task at hand.*

*"I'm going to walk the property. You stay inside with the door locked until I come back," he ordered in a husky voice.*

Charlie pulled a long-handled flashlight from his belt and left the porch to creep around the corner of the house, aiming the light beam into the darkness and balancing his service weapon over his wrist.

Sue waited behind the door, breathing much too fast, but not out of fear. She hadn't missed Charlie's appreciation for the feminine assets she was so shamelessly displaying. She was frustrated beyond shame after months of closeness, growing desire, and abortive attempts at intimacy, with only a few fleeting kisses to show for it.

If Charlie had any idea that the emergency call was a ruse, he gave no indication of it. Having failed to notify the tribal authorities, he was acting less like a police chief and more like a man, but a man in his element who was determined to protect the woman he was growing to love in the best way he knew how.

After Charlie swept the property and found no suspicious footprints beneath Sue's windows and no evidence of a prowler, he returned to her front door and tapped his knuckles against it.

"All clear, Sue."

She opened the door and stepped to the side in an unspoken invitation.

"Thank you for coming, Charlie," Sue said. "I was scared being alone. Leah and Seth are off this weekend with their friends." Sue didn't say "on patrol with the pack" and Charlie didn't ask. He'd seen Jacob morph into a wolf and through observation and a few carefully worded questions had guessed that Sue's kids harbored the same magic, though he avoided thinking about what it might mean.

*“Sure thing, Sue. I would have been upset if you hadn’t called me.”*

*“Can you stay for a little while until I calm down? I’ll get you some coffee.”*

*“I wouldn’t think of leaving you alone with a possible prowler around,” Charlie answered, laying his service weapon on an end table and dropping heavily onto the couch.*

*Sue brought him a piece of lemon pound cake she’d made especially for him and the promised coffee, and sat down beside him. If he wondered why she hadn’t covered herself more thoroughly, he didn’t ask. Instead, he tried to direct his gaze away from her full breasts and long, slim legs as she folded them next to her body.*

*She saw his flushed face and restless eyes and knew he wasn’t immune, but Charlie, self-conscious and out of practice as he was, didn’t make his move. I can see him sipping at his drink and nibbling at the cake, stretching the moments while his stomach churned with indecision.*

*“I’ll sleep on your couch tonight, so you won’t be alone,” he offered, his face flushing red.*

*After a pause filled with the cacophony of unspoken words, Sue responded softly, “I wish you wouldn’t, Charlie.”*

*Her response startled him and he looked at her, not comprehending. Then unable to help himself, he lowered his eyes to her cinnamon-colored cleavage.*

*Herself a woman of few words, Sue took his hand from where it gripped his thigh and pressed it against one barely covered breast, holding it to her while she gazed into his eye. It was a blatant signal not even Charlie could misread and he yielded to her*

*direction with the one hand and then the other, allowing himself to cradle both her breasts in his hands.*

*When Sue leaned in to kiss him, he yielded to that too and his high walls began to crumble. The lover in him, unleashed at last, pulled Sue against the sheltering strength of his chest and kissed her in a whole new way, the pent up passion of years sparking and catching fire. Sue deftly loosened the tie that held her robe together and it fell away, revealing her full breasts, her slim, flat stomach, and the lacy underpants she'd recently purchased from the Victoria's Secret catalog. With a huge intake of breath, Charlie raked his eyes over her body, laid bare for him alone, and pushed her down on the couch. He stretched over her, fully clothed, boots, gun belt, and all*

*Sue relives that night over and over as she sits quietly at Charlie's side in the Cullen living room. Everyone assumes that she's scrutinizing the vampires, preparing to leap into action should we suddenly threaten her Charlie. She's doing that too, but sooner or later her mind starts to wander and images of the first time she and Charlie made love begin rolling through her mind where only I can see.*

*At these times, I'm often surprised that my family doesn't notice the light twinkling in her black eyes or react to the warm flush of blood that steals across her cheeks. We are more restrained than humans ever know.*

## *Edward*

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