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# MUMspeak



WITH JUSTINE CULLEN

**T**he boys and I are in the middle of our bedtime kisses ritual - which goes: standard, Eskimo, butterfly, belly, armpit - when it dawns on me that in not a very long amount of time they probably won't want me to do it to them anymore.

And while, right now, Milo has that wet-dog smell typical of most sweaty little four-year-olds, and Iggy, oddly enough, kind of smells like brioche, I've been around enough pre-pubescent boys to know that soon they'll both just smell like... feet. So I don't think I'll be wanting to do the kisses ritual either.

It's an a-ha moment: my babies are growing up. And the proof has been flooding in at such a rate ever since that I've been a bit scared to walk into their bedrooms each morning in case I find hairs on their chest, beer on their breath, Madonna in their beds...

It starts simply enough. The next morning at the art gallery I'm telling Milo a story when he interrupts, in a voice that says he is bored out of his mind: "You said that already."

I know that tone. I use it on my own mother when I want her to wind it up. And wasn't it just yesterday that he used to get me to read *That's Not My Monster* over and over? How dare he accuse me of being repetitive. *He made me this way, god dammit.*

Soon after he sees a painting of a mother and child. He looks thoughtful. I'm expecting a wise art observation, from-the-mouths-of-babes style, but instead I get: "So... how exactly did a bit of daddy mix with a bit of you to make me?"

I ponder the various approaches I could go with - PG? Clinical? Nonplussed? - before opting for the very mature: Vague. "When a grown-up man and a grown-up woman love each other, they give each other a special kiss and it happens like magic. And did I mention that they have to be grown-up?"

"Where does the baby come out of?"

I take a deep breath. I'd always hoped they'd go to their dad for this sort of thing, he being the cool parent and all. "The mummy's vagina." He's probably never heard the word vagina before, but considering that 'magic' didn't get me anywhere, I now feel like the situation calls for some proper terminology.

"Does it hurt?"

"No," I lie, switching tactics and putting on my best chirpy storybook voice. "That's why it's called the miracle of life."

He seems reasonably satisfied. I'm relieved that it's over and that both of us got out relatively unscathed, but I'm not happy that we're at the sex-talks part of our relationship already. He spends the rest of the day trying to use the word vagina in as many sentences as possible, I spend it wondering how I can get him back to telling me what sound a lambie makes.

A few days later I'm hugging Iggy goodbye at kindy when Dakota, a fellow two-year-old, taps him on the shoulder before

throwing herself onto a beanbag. "Come here, Ziggy," she demands. Apparently he doesn't care that she can't even be bothered to get his name right. He drops me pronto and jumps onto the beanbag where they hug. Horizontally.

"Isn't that cute?" coos her mum.

"Cute like a fox," I mutter, thinking *this is what you get when you send your kids to Steiner*. Then a little boy tugs my skirt, saying "Iggy's my girlfriend, not hers," and suddenly the walls start to close in around me...

After school we go to the hairdresser. I've been holding off, but the knowledge that Iggy is in a same-sex relationship without either of the participants realising is something of a catalyst. The kids' salon is booked out, so I take them to mine

in the city. The stylist asks Iggy what his favourite song is. "Big Red Car?" she asks, proud that she's down with the preschool generation. Iggy looks at her like she's mad and starts belting out "Ticket to Ride". It could have been worse - it could have been, say, "Waking Up In Vegas" - but in my current state of mind it's still not very comforting that my baby prefers The Beatles to The Wiggles. Suddenly, a panic attack kicks in.

What did I do to turn my innocent babies into these freakish three-foot-tall adults before their time? Then I realise that they're both wearing skinny jeans and plaid shirts (sleeves rolled up, natch) so, rather than blaming myself, I blame fashion.

On the way home from the salon we stop in at Westfield. I buy an ABC Kids CD for the car and look for clothes to help me halt this accelerated maturity. In a sea of Ben 10 T-shirts (not a chance in hell) and kid-sized harem pants (the old me wants them, the new me resists), the closest I can find are some all-in-one pyjamas. In non-infant sizes they're kind of bizarre but deliciously babyish. I buy six pairs.

That night I let them both sleep in my bed. Who knows how long I have left of snuggles like this? But as I settle in between them in their funny, oversized rompers, Mi clutching Yellow Teddy and Ig sucking his fingers, I smell the perfect mix of wet dog and brioche and think, I may have a while yet.

**A PANIC ATTACK KICKS IN. WHAT DID I DO TO TURN MY BABIES INTO THESE FREAKISH THREE-FOOT-TALL ADULTS BEFORE THEIR TIME?... I BLAME FASHION.**

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