

She Says... **Faced With The Fact I'm A Kidult**



After contending with a man-child, Aoife Stuart-Madge admits that the guys aren't the only ones with Peter Pan syndrome...

Remember that scene in the movie *13 Going On 30* when

Jennifer Garner's pubescent self is confronted with her grown-up self's boyfriend and gets scared by the naked man in her apartment? Well, I often think that if my 13-year-old self was similarly transported into my present body and saw my husband in our apartment, she wouldn't be all that shocked. I mean, physically, he very much resembles a man, so the stubble, deep voice and all that manly stuff might cause slight alarm, but characteristically, he's not that different to the boys I dated when I was a teenager. Let's look at the evidence: he plays the Nintendo, dresses in jeans, a t-shirt and Converse (he does have one suit, but that's only for weddings and funerals) he plays fantasy football with his mates, loves *The Simpsons* and *South Park*, and he occasionally laughs at his own farts.

But then, I suppose people in stunted adolescent houses shouldn't throw emoticons. I mean, I'm not exactly the epitome of maturity myself. As a married woman in her early 30s, there are certain milestones of adulthood that I thought I'd have reached by now, like having fancy guest towels, going to the opera and shelling out for a mortgage. But the truth is, without the ring on my left hand telling me I'm officially a Grown Up, I might never have guessed.

Kidults At Play

You see, I don't have matching tableware, I don't listen to classical music, I've killed the only two houseplants I've ever had, and okay, I admit it, I still don't *really* understand what the FSTE Index is. What's more, there are certain childish habits that I'm pretty sure I should have ditched by now, but haven't quite managed to, like digging fancy dress parties, making up dance routines in my living room, and mainlining Haribo and calling it 'lunch'. But I guess there are some things I just haven't grown out of yet.

Even now when one of my friends gets pregnant, despite the fact that they may be in their 30s and married, my immediate reaction is, 'OMG, what are you going to tell your mum and dad?'

When I read news websites, I always click on the showbiz section first. And if a movie starring the Olsen twins or Melissa Joan Hart comes on TV, I'll still watch it.

So what's behind this arrested development? At first, I thought Dubai might be to blame. In a city where you can pay someone to clean your house, mend your clothes and even put up your curtains, and where partying all day on a Friday is not only acceptable, but actively encouraged, we've pretty much created a kidults' playground.

But it only takes a trip back home to prove kidulthood is not just a Dubai-centric problem, it's an international phenomenon. As soon as I set foot inside my childhood home, for example, I regress 20 years in an instant. Before my suitcases are even unpacked, I'm tutting at my mum for making me unload the dishwasher, wrestling my sister for the remote control and squabbling with my brother when he tries to sit in 'my seat' at the family dinner table. On our most recent visit to mum and dad's, I was one hissy fit away from uttering the immortal childish mantra, 'Mum, it's not fair!' And my husband was left wondering how he'd somehow ended up married to a stropky teenager – until we stopped off at his mum's house on the way back to Dubai... where he threw a temper tantrum when he discovered his mum had chucked out all his old football sticker books, and I knew we were even.

But thinking about it, I'm not really sure I want to be married to a proper Grown Up. In Grown Up world, you can't eat leftover takeout for breakfast, you can't

watch cartoons, unless they're satirical, and you can't read comic books, unless you call it a 'graphic novel.' Your socks always have to match, dates end straight after dinner, you can only dance if you're at a wedding (and only then if it's to a tune with a routine, like the *Macarena* or *YMCA*), bed is mostly just for sleeping and men wear chinos or 'dad' jeans.

Grown Up When It Counts

There's something to be said for a guy who can let loose and who doesn't take himself too seriously. Take Prince William and Harry. William goes on holiday and shakes hands with a succession of foreign dignitaries. Mature. And let's admit it, a little bit boring. Harry goes on holiday, and jumps in a swimming pool at a nightclub fully clothed. Immature. And extremely hot. Much as we ladies might say we want maturity in a man, deep down, there's nothing more appealing than a bit of wanton abandon. We might as well face it, some of the sexiest guys in history are basically just overgrown kids. Look at Matthew McConaugy and his naked bongo playing. Johnny Depp and his hotel room trashing... Then there's the Rolling Stones. Wrinkly man-children sure, but despite what Adam Levine says, nobody's got the moves quite like Jagger. Except maybe Elvis, and he was a grown man in a cape, for goodness sake.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating the kind of immature guy who runs a mile at the mention of commitment and who never calls when he says he will – there's a difference between someone who knows how to have fun and someone who is *emotionally* immature. I'm talking about the kind of childish irresponsibility that comes with staying out dancing until 4am, watching a box-set in one sitting, or ordering breakfast from Burger King.

So I don't mind that my man laughs at his own farts, doesn't wear a tie and can never find a matching pair of socks, so long as he can be mature when it counts. What's important is that he doesn't go bright red and snort when I mention my period; he takes my feelings more seriously than he does his own and he shows up when he says he will. But as a wise man once said, 'Maturity is knowing when to be immature.' So with that said, who's up for brunch this Friday? ■

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