

Jimmy Loves Melissa

Flash Fiction for Guests of the WordFeeder
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Once upon a time...

"I'll tell you the story of Jimmy Jet –
And you know what I tell you is true.
He loved to watch his TV set
Almost as much as you."*

*Text, from his children's poem, "Jimmy Jet and His TV Set,"
and embedded sketches are by Shel Silverstein (Where the Sidewalk Ends, 1974).

Tuesday, 6:47 PM, thirty-five years later...

"Hey." Jimmy was beat, and was beginning to suspect the internship the summer before he graduated had be a hoax. Just two excruciatingly stressful days into the week, and he'd had it. Monday's trip out of town on business hadn't gone well, but he was back. Tired, disheveled, he plopped his computer case and small duffle bag onto hallway floor in front of his apartment, and started fumbling for his keys just as Melissa got off the elevator and turned toward her apartment, the one directly across the hall from his.

"Hey," she responded, her raincoat folded over her left arm above the briefcase and handbag she was carrying, an overstuffed bag of groceries in the other.

"Here, let me help you with that." He was crazy about Melissa, and pretty sure she liked him, but getting their deal underway was taking forever.

"Sure," she smiled back at him, the sparkle in her eyes coming back on-line as she did. "Hold this while I get my key." He did, and she opened the door to her place. Walking inside past the kitchen, with Jimmy right behind her, Melissa dumped her stuff on the table, large enough for just two chairs, and turned back to Jimmy to take the groceries.

"Spaghetti and turkey meatballs?" she asked him, hoping he'd come over.

Jimmy's eyes looked away from hers, for just a second, at the French bread sticking out of the bag. "On-the-couch-picnic, in time for 'Bones' at 8? It's an episode I haven't seen."

She almost forgot to say anything, but remembered just before it became weird. "Deal."

Jimmy just stood there, reaching out for the door knob a full five feet behind him. Seeing his dilemma, Melissa put her hand against his chest and started walking, slowly pushing him back a couple of steps until he made contact.

“See you later,” he said, to which she nodded slowly back at him – no smile this time, but more of an expression resolute with anticipation that made him nervous.

Across the hall, he fumbled again for his keys, pushed his door open just crack, holding it open while he picked up the bags he’d left on the floor. Looking down, he saw the telltale whiskers of his cat who thought he was hiding from him, hoping he would open to door too wide and give him the shot he needed. “Hey, Dubie.” (It was short for “Dubious,” which described his gray and white cat perfectly.) Shuffling in, Jimmy did his best to prevent Dubie from escaping. “Miss me?”

“Meeeh,” which, according to Jimmy when Melissa asked him once, was Dubie-speak for, “You bet your bald ass I did!” Dubie was small, but then so was Jimmy’s apartment, the mirror image of Melissa’s.

Throwing both switches on the wall, the hall and kitchen lights went on. The flat screen in the living room was already on, having been set to bring up the NBC Nightly News at 6:30, and then switchover to the CBS Evening News “with Kay-tee Cur-ick” at 7. Jimmy loved saying her name with the announcer and, to disclose something he’d never admitted to anyone, thought she was hot. The TV in the corner of his bedroom did the same.

Pushing his door shut, he slid his computer case on the table by the kitchen, unzipped it and plugged in his laptop using the extra cord he kept at home, opened the lid, and repressed the on button, hardly missing a step on his way toward the balcony to see if Dubie was out of food and water.

The two TVs made it possible for him to move from room to room without having to wait for a commercial. Both sets were always on, even when he slept, a habit he’d picked up when he was a kid. At work, his computer was on-line all the time, his phone keeping him connected whenever he was out.

Changing out of his suit, Jimmy put on jeans and a t-shirt, and then had a thought that required a video call to Melissa.

“Hey.” He was in front of his webcam, she was in front of hers which was on a desk she had in her bedroom.

“Hey.”

“What are you doing?” as if he didn’t know.

“Changing into my jammies,” by which she meant the sweat pants and t-shirt she wore to bed. “But then that’s why you called,” she chided, moving her face right up to the screen, “isn’t it?”

“Actually, I called to ask if I should make some Sangria.”

“Oh, yeh? Well,” she thought for a moment, tying up her shoulder length hair into a haphazard bun, “sure. ...No peeking,” she advised him, waving her finger back and forth in front of the camera as if she was scolding him.

“Of course not,” he agreed, covering his face with his hand, but spreading his fingers to let his right eye keep watching.

Turning around, but moving only slightly away from being directly in front of the camera – Melissa unbuttoned and took off the business blouse she’d worn to work that day, and the bra under it. “How was your trip?”

“Okay. ..I’ll tell you about it over dinner.” Talking now would only break his concentration. Melissa had told him that she’d read in one of her Anthropology textbooks that men were programmed to do only one thing at a time.

Her back facing the camera, she looked over her shoulder to see if he was watching, careful not to turn too far around as she did. He was still there alright, and quickly closed up his fingers while she stretched her t-shirt over her hair and pulled it down. “I’ve got to fix dinner. See you later,” and she left the room, knowing full well, and liking every second of it, that he was still standing there, staring at the screen.

She had just the one TV in her living room on which “Access Hollywood” was bringing her up to date on the world of entertainment. If she’d been paying attention, she’d have learned that Michael Jackson was still dead, but hadn’t been buried yet. Why this particular show? Because it was so much better than “Entertainment Tonight.” Just in case, she’d straighten up her room, but not so much to make it look as if no one really lived there. Her blouse and bra were left purposely tossed over the back of her chair. (She’d had to do it twice to get it to look just right.) And the sheet and light blanket she slept under were pulled up, but not all the way, the one pillow left propped up vertically, and pushed in lightly on top of the other as if she’d been sitting up in bed reading.

At 7:45 exactly, she was in the kitchen now, stirring a pot of store-bought tomato sauce and some turkey meatballs she’d made a few days before. A big bowl of salad, napkins, silverware and plates were on the table for them to pick up, buffet-style, when her phone on the counter made its familiar “boob boop” to indicate an incoming text. “Knock, knock,” the screen said.

Going to the door, she looked through her peep hole, knowing who it was of course, but wanting to make it official. And there was Jimmy, checking his office e-mail, his arm under Dubie who insisted on coming, a pitcher of red wine and fruit in his other hand.

8:57 PM. Dinner had been delicious. The entire bread was gone, together with an entire stick of cold, real butter, and they were down to sucking on the orange slices left soaking in the pitcher of Sangria. Dubie was somewhere, but neither of them cared. Melissa had given him a couple pieces of meatball which he ate off the coffee table, and were the highlight of his day. Odds were he was taking a nap.

It was a good episode of “Bones” through which they talked and laughed incessantly about every detail, speculating about the precise circumstances when Dr. Brennan and Agent Booth would finally make it official. It was their way, Jimmy’s and Melissa’s, of asking the same question about themselves.

As fate would have it, Melissa had sliced up the half a watermelon she'd bought over the weekend, just in case. It was Jimmy's favorite dessert. The two of them sat there, some Lifetime movie starting up on the wide, HDTV a few feet across from them. Kitchen towels spread out on the coffee table, they leaned over, burying their faces into juicy, sweet slices, spitting their seeds, as best they could, into the glass bowl between them, only half of which made it. Three minutes later, they were making out like teenagers, which they barely weren't, in a frenzied explosion of pent up passion, watermelon juice dribbling recklessly down the sides of their mouths and on their hands, grabbing at each other's faces and t-shirts. ...until the cable went out, and they stopped.

"What was that?" Jimmy asked, almost in whisper.

"Why are you whispering?"

"It's so quiet." Their mouths were less than an inch apart.

"So? "

Jimmy's eyes began darting between Melissa's and the TV, now nothing more than a black window on the wall. His blinking became erratic, his breathing labored.

"Jimmy?" And just as quickly, the cable came back. The glowing lights and sounds of dialog and soundtrack filling the darkened room.

Turning back toward her, she felt the strength returning to his hands, moving again under her t-shirt – and they got back to finishing what they had started. Right there on the couch, because there was no TV in the bedroom, and Melissa wasn't about to risk it.

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