

THE VISITORS

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Jerry 's Best Day

Without a doubt Jerry Taylor was having the best day of his young life. He watched Renee walk into her house still feeling the cool sweat on his hand from hers. For months Jerry endured the pains of teenage infatuation; watching from a distance, the daydreams, the awkwardness; it was hell. But today made it all worth while. Lo and behold, against all the laws of chance, he finally talked to her. To his astonishment, she actually liked him.

On her way inside Renee turned and gave Jerry one last glance. She saw him looking and waved. Jerry waved back and turned on his heel to start walking toward his house. His feet might have been touching the pavement, but if they were Jerry couldn't feel them. Renee's affection alone was enough to make him as happy as a Republican with a upper class tax cut. But Renee was only the tip of the iceberg on Jerry's good day. On the wall in his room there was a calendar. For more than 2 months he'd marked off each day, all aimed at the target date he'd circled that morning. It was the last day of school.

To top it all off it was the resolution of what he'd come to call 'the dilemma.' Jerry's personal battle with the fundamental evil that is pre-calculus. Jerry sucked at math something fierce and although he studied harder for the final than he'd studied for any test in his life; he didn't know if he was going to pass before he tore open the envelope and saw the C- on his report card. In the comment section the teacher wrote, "Jerry showed a remarkable effort in the last couple of months, he should be proud of himself. Perhaps next time he will try harder from the beginning."

Whether or not Jerry was allowed to go to the end of the year camping trip was hanging on his passing calculus and a c- counted as passing. All of this added up to plenty of nuts for his sundae. But there was one final cherry; Renee said she would ask permission to go camping too.

It was a beautiful early summer afternoon, the heat was still waking up from it's winter nap and was not yet out in full force. Jerry's coat was securely tied to his book bag, the temperature ten degrees too warm to wear it. The air hung heavy with the scent of budding life; the growing plants and leaves were literally exploding from the earth, still rejoicing at winter's annual trip to somewhere else. Instead of going home Jerry plopped himself against the nearest oak tree. He leaned his face up into the sun and slid down the trunk till he was sitting. He stayed there a while, as content with this world as anyone could be. When he thought about anything at all, he thought about Renee.

She'd moved into the neighborhood a year earlier. For Jerry it was love at first sight. In the beginning he was afraid to so much as look in her

direction. In the first place she was a year older than him, a Junior to his Sophomore. Everyone knew teenage girls only dated at or above their social station. It was incredibly rare for a younger guy to date an older girl; it simply wasn't done. Of course his friends were more than happy to remind him of this fact every time he begged them to do some information gathering for him.

"Come on..." He would beg his closest friend Charlie, "She's in your Math class, you said that you sit behind her, do me a favor and ask her if she knows me, if she likes me. Please!" At this point he usually fell on the ground, wrapped his arms around Charlie's leg and looked up at him with the most hang-dog face he could conjure.

Charlie would just laugh and shake him off. "C'mon man," he would say. "You've been drooling after that girl for a year now. My asking her if she knows who you are isn't going to help anything. This is an older woman, you can't play this like we're still in middle school. Buck up and go talk to her. If you are unwilling to do that, I'm afraid I can't help you."

"But if you don't help me I'll never get to talk to her." Jerry whined.

"Ah yes, the Catch-22. Always a conundrum."

Jerry and Charlie both read Heller's book in Mrs. Spielman's English class.

"I know it's a Catch-22, and the point is that they're stupid, so help me Yosarian."

But Charlie never did. It would fall to Jerry to do for himself, and after only ten months, he actually did.

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It was the morning of his best day. Jerry was awake before his alarm started its terrible electronic pulse, a noise so horrid the dead turned away from it. There were eggs and bacon for breakfast, his favorite. He saw his parents most often in the mornings because they both worked weird ever-changing shifts at the hospital. (They were both RN's.) Most nights Jerry ate leftovers or ordered delivery food with money his parents left stuck to the refrigerator with a magnet. His Mom asked him how his math test went the previous day. He told her that he did well and his Mom smiled and told him that she knew he would do great if he buckled down and applied himself. His Dad, always the ray of sunshine, added that he had better have buckled down or he wasn't going camping. Jerry assured him, with a sureness he didn't feel, that he was going. His Dad softened then, and patted him on the back. Jerry's Dad wasn't a bad guy, he just forgot sometimes that kids were supposed to screw up and drift and stuff. Goofing off and getting into mischief wasn't necessarily an evil personality trait to be excised like a foul 18th century demon; not always, most times it was just being a kid. It wasn't like he was burning down buildings or anything.

After a quick reminder that he had to get himself a part time job that

summer (His Dad had one when he was fifteen and Jerry was going to have one too.), his parents sent him to school with a hearty "Have a good day sport," and two "I love you's." He left them to their day and headed out into a lovely morning, the sun already warm and bright on his skin.

Jerry always walked to school once winter packed its bags and went south for itself. He liked to stand at the top of the block, shielded by the newly risen sun and watch Renee leave for school on her bicycle. Often times her hair would be wet and she would be Jerry's first hormone filled lustful thought, as he pictured her naked in the shower.

He was early on his best day, and so he happened to be right in front of Renee's house on the opposite side of the street. When she emerged, her usual oversized backpack was missing because classes were effectively over. He would often hold his breath as she got going in the morning, the monstrosity of her backpack made her wobble drunkenly back and forth until she centered it properly on her back. Today she was wearing a long skirt and a t-shirt with little hearts scattered across it. She didn't see Jerry at all, she seemed preoccupied, distracted. She rolled her bike out of the garage, hopped on and shot down the driveway.

Her fall was terribly predictable, Renee had barely pushed her pedals through their first full rotation before the edge of her skirt caught up into the chain. Jerry could only watch as she wobbled wildly past him tottering from one side to the other as she tried to pull her skirt out of the chain.

It wasn't working, each time the wheel turned a little more of her skirt disappeared into the maw of the hungry sprocket. Jerry could hear her swearing as she fell into the grass, arms and legs flying akimbo. Seeing a wonderful chance to be the knight in shining armor he hurried across the street to Renee's side, helping her to her feet. She looked helplessly down at her hem which was stuck in the bike like a bear in a trap. She wasn't crying or anything, but she was clearly pissed. Her forehead was crinkled into a scowl and her lips were set hard into a line.

"Stupid, so stupid." Renee muttered to herself as Jerry bent down to free her from her bicycle. Renee had managed to get a good chunk of the material stuck in the chain and Jerry was very conscious of her legs sliding back and forth under the fabric as he worked to yank the skirt out without tearing it in the process.

He got her free but managed to appropriate a nasty little gash on his left hand in the process. It was strange, standing next to her, amazed to be this close, a hint of her perfume met his nostrils and for a minute he thought he might die from the mere proximity of her. Then the steady ache in this hand drew his attention back to his body. His hand was bleeding and there was enough chain grease on them to lubricate a supertanker.

"You really took a fall huh?" He asked.

Immediately thinking, 'Oh great, the first thing I ever said to this girl and

I sound like I'm a total rube.' Her lack of response solidified his feelings of conversational inadequacy. He saw that Renee's hands were bleeding. Not too badly, they were just scraped, but between the two of them they were a shambles.

"Look, I'm all messed up, I need to go inside to change and wash up. She looked at Jerry, seeming to actually see him for the first time. She noticed his hand. Little trickles of blood were hopping off of his fingertips and dotting the white sidewalk; they looked impossibly red in the morning sun. She took his hand in hers and examined the wound.

"Wow, you really cut yourself." Then she looked up at him furtively. He laughed inside himself, relaxing a little. Renee's first words to him were the lame-o equivalent to his own. The idea that she might be nervous to be around him crossed his mind quickly and then scampered away. It was impossible that a girl as pretty as Renee would ever be intimidated by the likes of him. Besides, Renee was actually touching his hand.

"C'mon, I'll take you inside and get that cleaned up." Dumbfounded that he was about to walk into Renee's house Jerry followed her; almost skipping in spite of the stinging in his hand.

Renee poured the Bactine over Jerry's hand and he did everything he could not wince from the sharp alcohol burning that crawled up his arm and lingered there. Then she blew on the wound, cooling the burning and instantly achieving the most erotic moment in Jerry's short life. He wasn't sure how he was supposed to deal with his feelings. He desperately wanted to act cool, to come off as aloof. But he wasn't a good actor. Jerry's Mom told him all of the time, "Your face is an open book Sweetie, I hope you don't set your heart on being a lawyer because I don't think you'll have much of a chance in any profession that deals with dishonesty as its stock and trade."

"You're shaking." She said placing a hand on the small of his back to steady him.

Jerry looked at her, feeling like he was going to fall into her amber eyes. She met his gaze unflinchingly and smiled.

"We've never been properly introduced." She said, "My name is Renee." She held out her hand. He shook it.

"I'm Jerry."

"I know." She said and her smile told him that she was completely aware of him. He wondered if she knew how long he'd been carrying a torch for her.

"We're going to be late for school." Jerry said. Looking down he realized he was still holding her hand and reluctantly let it drop. He needed some fresh air and he couldn't wait to get out of the house and into the open. He needed some fresh air.

"So what if we're late? It's the last day, I doubt they will even take attendance." Renee pointed out.

"Good point." He had to admit that it was.

"Now give me a minute. I'm going to change out of this skirt and then we'll walk together to school.

Not knowing what else to do he agreed. He sat down in the living room trying not to think about the fact that somewhere, within fifty feet of where he was sitting, Renee was dressed only in her underwear. His right leg bounced nervously with a rapidity sufficient to keep time with a speed-metal song.

After a minute or two she came down, now wearing shorts and matching top. She looked terrific and Jerry told her so. To his surprise her cheeks reddened slightly with his declaration. Again he convinced himself that it was impossible that such a beautiful creature could care about his clumsy compliments.

They walked toward school, not really hurrying.

"So what are you doing over the summer?" Renee asked, sounding legitimately interested.

"Well, if I passed my Pre-Calc final, a miracle of rather biblical proportions; if that happens a big group of us are going camping for a week out by Lake Griffy."

"That sounds like a great time."

"Do you want to come?"

The invitation flew out of his mouth before he had a chance to scare himself out of asking.

And then, just as quickly, she agreed.

"As long as my parents say it's alright of course."

Then it happened, the act that would put a stupid happy grin on his face for the rest of the day. She took his hand in her own.

"Thank you for helping me when I fell. You rescued me Jerry." She smiled at him fetchingly.

He was young, but not so young that he couldn't recognize falseness when he heard it. She didn't really think he saved her, and to be fair he hadn't. However, the fact that she cared enough to say it, to try to inflate his ego. It touched him. It made him like Renee the person as much Renee the image he made in his mind.

The school appeared at the end of the block and before either of them knew it they were standing in front of the main entrance, the lot deserted because classes started fifteen minutes earlier. Before parting Renee thanked him again for his help, wished him luck on his test results, and promised to meet him after school.

"You can walk me back home and make sure I'm safe." She said, smiling sweetly.

Jerry watched her disappear into her class. For a minute a nearly uncontrollable urge swept over him, he wanted to yell, scream, dance, and clap his hands with joy. No matter what else happened, this particular last day of school would stick with him for a very long time.

His first class crawled by at a cold syrup pace. He wanted very badly to

tell his best friend Charlie what happened but he was on the other side of the room. He greeted Jerry with a "Where were you?" look when he came in, but neither boy was able to elaborate until the first bell rang.

As soon as the bell rang Jerry rushed to Charlie, trying to tell him everything all at once and succeeding only in babbling a stream of indecipherable gibberish. Charlie was a lanky boy with a mop of red hair. Charlie was a good four inches taller than the next tallest kid in his class.

"Whoa, slow down. One thing at a time." Charlie said, laughing. "I made out the name Renee, and everything else was a blur."

Jerry went through the morning's events describing them one at a time. This made for a much more coherent story.

When he was finished Charlie looked at him with genuine admiration. "You finally get a chance to talk to her after a year, and you're holding her hand within a half an hour? If we were old enough I would make you buy me a lottery ticket, seems to me that you'd be a shoe-in today."

"Yeah," Jerry said smiling, "I figure I'm about the luckiest guy walking around on two legs. The only thing that could spoil my day would be if I flunked my test, but right now I feel like I probably got an A+."

"Now don't get carried away."

"OK a B."

"That's a little more realistic for a fantasy."

He received his test back after lunch. B+. Jerry actually hopped out of his desk and did a quick little victory dance, resisting the urge to grab his teacher and give him a big kiss on the cheek. Before long the school day was over and Jerry fairly glided down the hallways of the school; halls he wouldn't have to see again for months. In one of the administrations few gestures of humanity the overhead intercom system was playing Alice Cooper's "Schools out for summer." It was a little outdated, but the effort was admirable in Jerry's opinion.

Walking out into the sun of the afternoon Jerry was pleased to see that the weather had somehow managed to become even more delightful than it was when he'd arrived. Sure enough, Renee was out front waiting for him, just like she said she would be. He felt his stomach tighten when he approached her. Suddenly the morning seemed like a dream from long ago and Jerry worried that Renee's senses returned to her in the course of the day.

Instead she asked, "So how did you do?"

For a split second he didn't know what she was talking about. He was too busy looking into her eyes, marveling at the depths he found there.

"Huh? Oh yeah." He finally replied, "I did fine, I got a B+ on the test, I'm allowed to go camping." He paused and then added, "I really hope that you can come too, it wouldn't be the same without you."

"That's so sweet." She said, kissing him lightly on the cheek. Jerry's heart skipped a minimum of two beats. They set off towards her house. She

nonchalantly slid her hand into his.

"Tell me the truth." She said once they were about half way home.
"You've liked me for a long time haven't you?"

A frog the approximate size of King Kong suddenly took up residence in Jerry's throat. He felt all of the saliva in his mouth dry up.

"Yeah." He croaked, not wanting to lie when she so clearly knew the truth.

"For a year now I've seen you following me from a distance, watching me when I left for school, sometimes even when I came home.

Shame turned Jerry a very deep shade of red, for the briefest moment he wanted to bolt away, run before she pulled her hand from his and told him he was a terrible sick pervert. Instead she squeezed his hand.

"It's OK. I knew you were there. I liked it. I liked that you were shy, afraid to talk to me, it's quite a compliment really. But when I needed help, when it mattered, you were there in a heartbeat. Your caring for me overruled your fear. I especially like that. You have a good heart."

"But you barely know me." He said, telling himself to shut up as the words came out of his mouth.

"That may be true, but a girl knows certain things. I don't know how many times I watched your friend Charlie try to get up the nerve to ask me about you. But he never did it."

"He didn't want to have to be the one who brought the message that you had no idea who I was. He was afraid I'd get shot down."

"I wouldn't have shot you down, but again, it's cute that you thought that I would."

"Well you know, you're older..."

"Actually we're the same age, I just skipped first grade."

"Beautiful and brilliant."

Now it was Renee's turn to blush.

"Thanks."

"Well even so," Jerry continued, "It's not like there are a lot of sophomore guys dating Junior girls."

"Well I'm not most Junior girls."

Jerry looked right into her eyes and held the gaze, his stomach was fluttering. "I know that you're not most Junior girls, you're not most any other girls. That's why you talking to me makes me so happy."

They walked to her house, he gave her his phone number and a short kiss. Which brings us back to the beginning of our story.

The fact that Renee was blue and of an alien race didn't affect Jerry's happiness one iota.