

JIMMY'S SWING

The date I had circled on my calendar so long ago had suddenly arrived and what a long, tiring day it's been. The rental moving van, parked in front of the house, is finally filled with the furniture I'm keeping and the boxes we've spent the week packing so carefully.

"There!" my son exclaims as he shuts the van's back door with a resounding bang. "That's the last box – we're finished! I don't know about the rest of you but I'm starving! Let's get cleaned up and get to that restaurant!"

Waving and shouting one last goodbye, he and my granddaughters climb into his truck. From my front porch, I watch the truck make its way down the long, gravel driveway, followed closely behind by my grandson at the wheel of Jimmy's old pick-up. I smile remembering how Jimmy loved teaching our grandson the "inner mysteries" of his old truck. They had spent many happy hours tinkering under its hood, which resulted in Jimmy and our grandson being the only two who could, or **would**, drive it.

Watching both vehicles disappear, I hear the shrill blast of the old pick-up's horn followed by peals of laughter. As they round the bend by the old maple tree, the distant echoes of horns and laughter fade away, becoming part of all the other early evening sounds.

That happy, boisterous group will soon be waiting for me and my daughter-in-law at the new restaurant in town. Having been too busy to stop for lunch, we're all looking forward to the restaurant's dinner buffet. I'm meeting everyone at the new house

tomorrow morning – the new house that, my family keeps assuring me, will feel like home in no time at all but, privately, I have my doubts.

I make my way to the back porch to wait for my daughter-in-law. She wanted to do one final check to make sure nothing had been left behind. Lowering myself into the old porch swing, I still can't believe I'm leaving. Relaxing in the stillness of this warm June night, my thoughts drift back to the life Jimmy and I shared here.

I was suddenly 18 again, working for the summer in the kitchen of the town's only diner. As usual, the regulars were laughing with Mick Sullivan's nephew. He had arrived from Ireland three months earlier to help out on his uncle's farm, planning to return home after the harvest. I found him very irritating and couldn't wait for him to leave. Not a Saturday went by when he didn't complain about what he was served. I couldn't understand why he even bothered to come back every week. That particular morning, after he had sent his breakfast back for the third time, I ran out of patience. Holding his plate, I stormed out of the kitchen, marched to his table, slammed his plate down, and told him exactly what I thought he could do with his breakfast. He stood up, gave me a crooked grin and told me he had only been trying to get my attention and "praise be to all the Saints in Ireland", it had finally worked! With everyone around us laughing and obviously enjoying my embarrassment, I quickly headed back to the safety of the kitchen. When his uncle's health suddenly failed, Jimmy stayed and took over the O'Brien farm. Two years later, we were married.

Rocking slowly in the old swing, enjoying its comforting creak as I look out over the garden, I remember the same argument Jimmy and I had every year. As one of

those arguments floats by on the evening breeze, I recall that afternoon as if it were yesterday –

“I don’t know why we have to go through this again, Jimmy. The yard back here needs more colour. You know perfectly well you can’t use this spot for anything else except to park that old tractor of yours. Besides, it’s not only flowers I’m going to plant. Have you forgotten the taste of those fresh vegetables we had last year? I thought we’d make the garden just a bit wider, plant some bulbs here, lilac bushes over there and that far border could use something, too. Once that’s all done, we should be able to see everything from the back porch.”

“Just. A. Bit. Wider.” Jimmy had slowly repeated each word as he picked up his shovel. “You be saying the same thing every spring, Girl! There be more flowers growing back here than vegetables. We can’t be eating flowers, can we now, and just why would we be needing to see them from the back porch?”

“We’ll want something to look at from the swing, Jimmy.”

“The sun’s got to you, Girl! I be telling you what we be needing – seed and fertilizer for planting! Look at that barn door over there and it be hanging by one hinge!”

“You could build us a swing, Jimmy, where we can sit together and rock our baby.”

“First it be flowers, then a swing, and now a baby she be talking about,” Jimmy had grumbled softly.

I can still see his look of amazement as he suddenly realized that, after eight years, our miracle had finally happened. The shovel dropped to the ground and, just as

his arms had encircled me that long ago afternoon, the echoes of his whoops of joy encircle me now, easing the ever-present pain in my heart.

Resting my head back on the faded, worn cushion I sigh, remembering how many times we had sat here looking out over this garden. Jimmy had been right, of course. I can't remember the last time I planted any vegetables, but the flowers flourished and every year cover the ground with a carpet of colour. I simply ignored his annual tirade, knowing that Jimmy had enjoyed that colourful display as much as I had. Another memory surfaces.

"Could you be coming out here a minute, Girl?" Jimmy had called from the back porch the day we brought our baby home from the hospital. As I stood speechless in the doorway, I could only stare.

"Well, don't just stand there, Girl, what do you make of it?"

There, on the back porch, swaying gently in the morning breeze, was a beautiful, wooden swing.

"It's a swing, Jimmy!" I exclaimed as sudden tears slid down my cheeks.

Shaking his head, Jimmy wrapped our baby son and me in one of his bear hugs. "Now give over and stop that crying, Girl. Never can understand why you always be crying when it's happy you're supposed to be," he said with that playful grin on his face.

"Oh, Jimmy," were the only words I could finally whisper.

Despite what my son told me about low mortgage rates and investment opportunities, I believe it was Jimmy's swing and the garden that had captured the hearts of the new owners. The new owners – those words still sound so strange. John and Molly Sullivan are a young, friendly couple with so many plans for the future. I like

them, otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to part with the home Jimmy had worked so hard to provide or the land he had tended so lovingly.

Remembering the day they had first viewed the farm makes me smile. I had overheard Molly talking to John as she pointed out the garden -

"And just wait until all the flowers are in bloom! I know it'll look just like a giant box of crayons that has toppled over. If we make the garden just a bit wider, we could even plant some vegetables. Can't you just taste them? John - look! There's even a swing on the back porch! We could sit there every night and talk about our day!"

"...and talk about our day," I whisper.

Ever since he built the swing, Jimmy and I talked about everything right here. Should we plant wheat this year or beans? Should we put the new roof on the house now or wait until next year? How can our son be old enough to drive when it seems only yesterday that Jimmy was holding him up on his first bicycle? He would be just fine, wouldn't he, at that university so far away?

It was here where we had learned that our son had met the girl he would one day marry. It was here where we had heard the exciting news that we were going to become grandparents. It was here, where Jimmy had gently sat me down one summer night two years ago, took my hand in his, and quietly told me what Dr. Jordan had explained to him that afternoon. I miss Jimmy so much. Sitting here in the swing always brings me such comfort - I can almost feel him sitting next to me.

The breeze is picking up but the evening air is still warm and fragrant with the smell of lilacs. Jimmy continually complained about those lilacs.

“...and if you had your way, Girl, you be having more lilacs growing on this farm than crops in the field,” he always ranted. He never fooled me, though. He always picked the season’s first giant bouquet to be proudly displayed in the middle of our kitchen table.

My heart aches knowing that I have to leave our swing behind. I can plant flowers and lilacs at the new house but what will I do without the comfort of Jimmy’s swing? I tried to explain this to my daughter-in-law but she had quickly replied, “Mother, you know the Sullivans want it and besides, how could we possibly get that old swing down? Don’t you think it’s better to leave it right where it is? If you must have a swing, I’m sure we can find one at that new lumber store in town. We’ll get them to deliver it to your new house and put it together. Just think, you’ll have a new swing without that irritating creak!”

I just can’t make this practical woman understand that I don’t want a new swing. It’s **this** swing, Jimmy’s swing, that means so much to me. I know she’s right - it does make more sense to leave Jimmy’s swing right here where it’s always been. I’m sure the Sullivans will give it the same loving care that we did, and make their own memories sitting here. As if on cue, my daughter-in-law opens the back door.

“I’m finished here, Mother,” she says, “Are you ready to go? I don’t want to rush you but we’ll have to hurry if we’re going to meet the others at the restaurant on time. Don’t forget to take that house key out from under that flower pot to give to the Sullivans.”

“I’ll be right in, dear, and thanks for reminding me about the key,” I reply, although I had remembered and had given it to my grandson earlier today. He’ll give it

to the Sullivans when he comes back early tomorrow morning to pick up the moving van. I know they're excited and will be here very early.

My daughter-in-law makes me smile. She loves to keep everyone and everything organized. Our son lovingly describes her as, "Time Management Personified". Our son. I remember when he told us what we had somehow always known. He loved the land and respected our work, but it just wasn't in his heart to follow in our footsteps.

"He doesn't have to be like us, does he now," Jimmy told me later, "It's surely more than enough that he be of us."

I love our son and his family unconditionally but it's Me-Lad, as Jimmy called our only grandson, who reminds me so much of my Jimmy.

"He does have a name, you know," I would remind Jimmy.

"Don't we all, Girl, now don't we all," he always replied, with that playful grin I loved so much.

Slowly getting up from Jimmy's swing, I take a final, heartfelt look at my garden, and gently caress the old, weathered wood for the last time.

"Goodbye, Jimmy," I whisper. "You promised that you'll always be watching over me, and I promised that I'll move forward and live a happy life. I'm so sorry, I just don't know if I can keep that promise! I love and miss you so much!"

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This morning, walking into the new house, I can't help noticing the giant bouquet of lilacs sitting in the middle of the kitchen table. I'm just about to ask about them when my grandson calls from the back porch.

"Could you come out here a minute, Gran?"

Standing speechless in the doorway, I can only stare.

“Well, don’t just stand there, Gran, what do you think?”

There, on the back porch, swaying gently in the morning breeze, accompanied by the sound of a familiar, comforting creak, is a beautiful, old, weathered, wooden swing!

“Why, it’s Jimmy’s swing!” I exclaim as sudden tears slide down my cheeks. “But I don’t understand - how did it get here? And what about the Sullivans?”

“Dad and I spent half the night taking it down and the other half putting it back up here,” my grandson answers with a familiar, playful grin on his face. “Now give over and stop that crying, Gran. I’ll just never understand why you always cry when you’re supposed to be happy! And don’t you worry about the Sullivans. As soon as Dad explained how much this swing meant to you, they insisted that you have it. John helped us and said to tell you that they found a swing at that new lumber store. Dad and I are going to help them put it together so there’s nothing for you to be fretting about!”

“The last time I saw Gramps,” he says softly, wrapping me in one of his bear hugs, “I told him to rest easy now and not be worrying. I’d always be around to do the watching over his Girl for him.”

My eyes fill with more unshed tears as I look up into the sparkling blue ones of my grandson – the same brilliant blue that had been part of my life for over fifty years. He was the only one who shared that vivid colour with my Jimmy.

“Oh, Jamie Me-Lad,” I finally whisper.

Listening to my family’s happy, noisy banter, as they explain how they had all been in on the “secret of the swing”, I hear the quiet echo of Jimmy’s laughter

surrounding us. As if pushed by unseen hands, the creaking swing continues to rock gently in the morning breeze. I now understand that Jimmy will be with me, wherever I am. He will always have a cherished place with all of us - in our hearts, our lives, and our memories.

I smile. I know that I am home. I know that I will be happy here.