

# What a Happy Time We'll Spend

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*This story originally started out as a one-shot about a movie night, nothing more and nothing less. However, it turned into something much more as I wrote it. I fly by the seat of my pants a lot while I'm writing and 90% of the time, I go where my imagination leads me. In this case, it led me straight to this Murder, She Wrote Slice of Life in which Jessica and Seth have a night of revelations over a classic film. I guess the real moral of the story here is that imagination can do great things... and that Chitty Chitty Bang Bang is actually a heck of a date movie!*

"How about *The Wizard of Oz*?"

"No, thanks. I love that movie as much as the next person, but I'm not in the mood to look at the Wicked Witch's ugly mug tonight. *The Last American Hero*?"

"No, thank you. *Singin' In The Rain*?"

"Nor am I in the mood to hear Lina Lamont screeching. What about *Smokey and the Bandit*?"

"And listen to Jackie Gleason curse a blue streak at the top of his lungs? No, thank you!"

"Well, shoot fire, woman; what are we gonna do?"

"I'm simply going to have to convince you that a musical is the right way to go for tonight's movie."

"Well, Jess, we don't have all night."

When it came to arguments, Jessica Fletcher and Seth Hazlitt were old pros. They frequently engaged in bickering over this, that, and the other thing, but the bickering was never vicious or heated. Their banter was

always good-natured and frequently ended in laughter, but tonight, there was a dangerous possibility that a mirthless outcome would be the result of this argument. For weeks, Jessica and Seth had planned a movie night – just the two of them at Jessica's house, finally free from their busy schedules, curled up with popcorn, hot tea, and a good movie. But at the present time, it appeared that the movie night was at a standstill, for neither Jessica nor Seth could agree on a film. Jessica, in an old-Hollywood mood, wanted to watch a classic musical, whereas Seth had a need for speed and a good car movie. The popcorn was ready and the tea was set to pour, but the TV stood silent while the detective and the doctor continued to razz each other.

"We've been planning this movie night for weeks now, and all you want to do is watch car chases? Honestly, Seth, you can see that any time on *Miami Vice!*"

"I'd sooner take Crockett and Tubbs over *Singin' In The Rain*. I love the movie, Jess; I really do, it's just that we've watched it so many times. The last time we watched it together, 'Moses Supposes' was stuck in my head and I went to sleep counting not sheep jumping a fence, but Don Lockwood and Cosmo Brown tappin' on chairs."

Jessica sighed. "All right, Seth. Obviously, we're getting nowhere. You want things your way and I want them mine."

"Well, this ain't Burger King, Jess. Unless you can think of some movie that has cars and musical numbers in it, neither one of us is gonna have it our way."

It was as though someone threw the switch on the light bulb above Jessica's head. Her eyes widened and a smile spread across her face, and she snapped her fingers in delight. "That's it! Seth, you're a genius!"

Seth narrowed his eyes. "Just once, I would love to get a peek into your head so I can see the wheels turning. What are you up to, Jessica Beatrice?"

Jessica clamped a hand to her forehead. "I'm an idiot. I can't believe I didn't think of it before!"

"You are far from an idiot, but for pity's sake, woman, spit it out! What are you thinking now that you didn't think before?"

Jessica grinned and clapped her hands on Seth's shoulders. "*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang!*"

"*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang?*"

"We love you," Jessica sang, her blue eyes sparkling with mischief.

Seth laughed in spite of himself. "Lord, now there's a movie I haven't seen in a coon's age. That car cracks me up, and you can never go wrong with anything Dick Van Dyke's in."

"Exactly! It's perfect!"

The doctor let out a chuckle mixed with a sigh. "All right, you've got me. We'll spend the evening watching *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.*"

"And what a happy time we'll spend." Jessica winked at him before running off to get the tape.

Before long, the moon had risen over Cabot Cove and movie night was finally underway at the Fletcher house. Jessica and Seth were munching popcorn and making commentary on certain scenes and nearly every song – and in Jessica's case, either humming or singing along to the music. Seth watched her with a fond smile, but refrained from singing himself, something that Jessica was quick to notice.

"Why don't you sing along?" she asked, giving him a gentle elbow in the ribs.

"Can you honestly picture me, Cabot Cove's town doctor and resident grouch, singing 'Toot Sweets'?"

Jessica chuckled. "Point taken. But there must be one song you can't resist."

"Just wait, Jess. Just wait."

By the time Caractacus Potts had snuck into the funfair, Jessica had to excuse herself briefly to fetch more popcorn from the kitchen, leaving Seth

to enjoy the film. As she dumped more of the fluffy kernels into the bowl, she listened as the next musical number struck up... and then the strangest thing filtered through her eardrums. Another voice was joining in with Dick Van Dyke's and the funfair chorus, one familiar, gravelly, and slightly off-key. *Seth!* Seizing the popcorn bowl, Jessica darted back into the living room and burst out laughing when she saw Seth grooving on the couch and singing along to "Me Ol' Bamboo" with all his might. The instant she laughed, he stopped mid-verse and grinned cynically at her. "And what is so funny, Madame Detective? I'm finally singing; you ought to be ecstatic."

"I am, Seth, I am," Jessica chortled as she sat back down and handed him the bowl of popcorn. "I just have this funny picture in my mind of you kicking up your heels to this song."

Now it was Seth's turn to laugh. "Jess, if I ever tried kicking my legs up as high as Caractacus Potts does in this scene, I'd pull a muscle, throw out my back, *and* fall on my butt."

"Well, at least you'd have plenty of padding to fall on."

Seth rolled his eyes. "Thank you, Shecky Fletcher," he drawled, knowing full well that there was no malice behind the jab. He could tell by the glitter in her eyes that she was only pulling his leg, and Jessica would never do anything to hurt him... just as he'd never do anything to hurt her.

They sat in silence for a while until the title song began, Seth singing along by himself on the first one and Jessica harmonizing with Sally Ann Howes's part on the reprise. And then came "Truly Scrumptious" and "Lovely, Lonely Man," where Jessica got her chance to shine. Seth, who had been digging into the popcorn, froze with his hand in the buttery bowl and stared at his friend, spellbound. Very rarely did Jessica sing, but when she did, she revealed that she had another God-given gift: her voice. He'd heard that voice singing along to songs on the radio in full-throated glory and soothing children to sleep, as sweet and warm as melted chocolate. Why she didn't sing more often was beyond him, although in moments like this, it was something he cherished.

Seth didn't even realize that he was still staring when the song ended until Jessica glanced over at him and asked, "Seth, why are you staring at me?"

He blinked, snapping out of his trance, and smiled when the question sank in. "Sorry. Just your voice."

"What about it?"

"I was mesmerized."

"Mesmerized? Seth, you make me sound like a siren, for heaven's sake!"

"I mean it, Jess. You have such a beautiful voice; why you don't sing more often is beyond me."

Jessica blushed. "I just sing because I like to, not because I think I have anything special. I'm nowhere near as good as my cousin Emma. If you could hear her sing, you'd change your mind about me in a heartbeat."

On impulse, Seth reached out and took her hand. "Nothing could ever change my mind about you." They held each other's gazes for a good while, their hands clasped, until the next song snapped them both out of it. Recognizing the jaunty march immediately, Jessica chuckled. "Speaking of Emma, this is her favorite song from the movie."

Seth began to laugh. "Well, if she's as British as you told me, it's no wonder her favorite song is 'Posh!'" He gazed at her thoughtfully. "What's your favorite song from this movie? I don't think I've ever asked you."

Jessica thought for a moment, raising a finger to her chin. "It's hard to say. I love them all so much. Oh, Lord... can you settle for my top two instead of just one?" When he nodded, she continued on. "Okay. I love the title song, but then again, who doesn't?"

"Amen to that one."

"And I love 'Truly Scrumptious.'"

"Why? Because it's easy for you to sing along with?"

"No, because it makes me think of all the kids I've ever known in my life. Every single child is truly scrumptious to me, probably because I've never had children of my own."

That sentence bore such a bittersweet note that Seth's heart was touched. His eyes drifted from her face to her stomach. What would it have been like, he wondered, if Jessica had actually been pregnant in all the years he'd known her? How different would her life have been if she'd had children? Tenderly, he reached out and rubbed her belly. "Funny what you never think about," he murmured. "It really would've been something to see. You with a baby in your arms. Your belly getting bigger."

Jessica's hand touched his, stilling his motions on her midriff, and he looked back up at her to see tears glistening in her eyes. "I can't tell you how many times I've thought about it. What it would have been like to be pregnant, to feel that precious mix of myself and Frank growing in my body... and then what it would've been like to hold that baby in my arms." She smiled and squeezed his hand. "You know, Seth, I've never told you this. Frank and I always said that if we ever did have children, we'd ask you and Ruth to be their godparents. I'm just so sorry it never happened."

Seth took both of her hands in his and pressed them close to his heart. "Jess, don't apologize. Never apologize for that. If you and Frank had had kids, Ruth and I would've been honored to be their godparents. It may not have ever happened, but something else happened in its place. The Lord may not have blessed you with kids of your own, but He sent Grady to you. He's more like a son to you than a nephew. I know I'd be proud to call him my son."

"You would?"

"Of course I would. He's a good kid. He may call you 'Aunt Jess,' but he loves you as though you were his mother – and you have been that to him and more. You're blessed with him, Jessica."

A tear rolling down her cheek, Jessica moved over and wrapped her arms around Seth, holding him tight as his big arms came around her in a return embrace. "And with you." She kissed his cheek and rested her head against his shoulder. "Thank you, Seth. Thank you."

Words wouldn't come to form a response. All emotion seemed to pour itself into letting actions speak louder than words as Seth cupped Jessica's chin with one hand and tilted her face back up until she was looking in his eyes. He captured her tear with one finger, letting that finger caress her cheek until his hand was cradling her chin again. Looking at her now, he was also

reminded of her favorite song... although it held a different, much deeper meaning for him. *Truly scrumptious... you, Jess, are truly scrumptious*, he paraphrased the lyrics in his mind, gazing at the face that held great physical beauty and masked a soul that was more beautiful than anything else. His heart was indeed beating unruly as his eyes drank in her golden-blond hair, her sapphire eyes, and the cherry red of her lips against the soft peach of her skin. *Cherry-peach parfait. I wonder if she tastes just as sweet...* He smoothed his thumb over her bottom lip and her breath warmed his fingers, a sweet invitation. And he accepted it with every beat of his heart.

"Jess..." Her name came out as a whisper before his lips touched hers. Every fiber of his being fought the urge to moan with pleasure. Her lips were every bit as soft and sweet as he'd imagined, and he captured them with his again, more urgently this time. He was amazed that she hadn't pulled away from him in shock, and the amazement only doubled when her lips became pliant rather than stiff and she kissed him back. Their arms came around each other as the kiss deepened, exploring and tasting. *Jessica...* his mind moaned her name, one hand caressing her back and the other snaking upward to sink into her hair. *Oh, Jess...*

Suddenly, the kiss broke. Bewildered and half-drunk from kissing her, Seth opened his eyes to see Jessica holding her hands to her lips, her eyes as wide as an owl's. "Jess? Are you all right?"

"I'm... I'm all right. I'm better than all right." She raised her eyes to his. "Seth... you're my friend."

*Friend.* That term sounded so cold after the moment of passion they'd just shared. "Ayuh," he said slowly, treading carefully.

"We've been friends for so long, I feel comfortable telling you just about everything. Everything, that is, except one very important thing." She inhaled deeply and let it out. "I've kept this inside for years for a number of reasons. I was always worried that if I began to have feelings for another man, I'd be betraying Frank's memory. But when we kissed just now, all I felt was peace. It was almost as though Frank were telling me that it was all right... that he was happy for me." She took another deep breath. "I also didn't want to risk losing our friendship because... I wasn't sure of your feelings for me. But you were the one who took the first step tonight. *You* kissed *me*. Which leads me to believe..."

"Yes?"

"That *you* love *me*." A smile touched her lips as his eyes widened. "Am I right?"

Warmed by her smile, Seth let out a chuckle that was more than a little suffused with relief. "Yes. I do love you, Jess, more than anything."

All at once, it was as though a burden had been shed and fireworks had exploded within him: the heavy load gone with his declaration of love and the fireworks ignited when Jessica laughed and embraced him once again. "And I love you, Seth Hazlitt. I love you so much." Another round of passionate kisses began, but were soon interrupted when the Baron and Baroness Bomburst launched into "Chu-Chi Face." At that moment, they saw the funny side of their makeout session in light of the goofy scene in the film, and the two of them burst into peals of laughter.

"Seth... promise me that you won't ever call me Chu-Chi Face," Jessica choked out, laughing helplessly on into Seth's shoulder.

"No worries," Seth said, wiping tears of laughter from his eyes. "I'll think of another pet name."

"You call me *woman*. That's enough for me."

When the last mirthful tears had been shed and wiped away, Jessica and Seth finally settled into each other's arms to enjoy the remainder of the film. However, when Caractus and Truly kissed for the first time, their dialogue prompted Seth to ask another question. "You know, Jess... we had our first kiss tonight. Does this mean we have to get married now?"

Jessica looked up at him, those blue eyes laughing. "That question can only be answered with another question. And I believe you know what that question is."

Seth had only meant the question in jest and there was humor twinkling in Jessica's eyes, but her tone was totally serious. Would she, if he asked? "Will you?"

"Will I what, Seth?"



"Will you marry me?"

"Yes!"

Lips met again in a dance of joy, Jessica and Seth celebrating while Caractacus and Truly flew off in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. New horizons were opening and there was time to spare – and what a happy time Jessica and Seth were ready to spend together, forever.