



I carry you ...

In My  
Heart



Kata Mlek

I carry you in my heart, everywhere, all the time. Every moment of every day, I feel your presence inside me. That's not all, though. I can smell your hair and your five a.m. coffee. I feel your cold feet under the comforter. Everything I touch reminds me of you and everything I see brings up memories of the perfect life we had. It was amazing, really special—just like you. I miss you so much! Sometimes I'll call out to a man I see in the street, *hey Jimmy*, and only when they turn around, looking confused, do I realize that it wasn't you. You always smiled when I called you. And kissed me when we met. And hugged me. Now I just get looks full of pity and disdain.

You're the first thing I think of in each morning, like right now. I stare at the ceiling and wonder if you can see me here, half asleep and with a bad case of bed head. *God I hope not*, I laugh, wishing you could hear my little joke. You always had a great sense of humor, making me laugh even when the world was so dire that I felt like hanging myself. I smile and make myself blink a few times—no tears! I get up, fumbling for my slippers, when I see it. A watch. On the cabinet. Not mine—a man's watch.

I forget about my tears and the slippers, reach it in a few quick strides, and grab it. I look it over carefully: the casing is silver and the hands are blue.

"Pen, what is this?" I ask Penguin, who's just come into the bedroom, hoping for a bowl of dog chow now that I'm finally awake. "Jimmy, what's going on?" I ask you aloud. But of course you don't answer—it reminds me of how you were when you were focused on your work, Mr. IT Ninja. You wouldn't even hear me sometimes.

I close my hand over the watch and go to the kitchen, asking you questions under my breath. *How did it get here? And why?* You still don't answer, so I toss it into a drawer—let it stay in there, with the old batteries and the light bulbs and the half-full notebooks. I've got no idea how it got here, and I decide I don't care. "Fuck it!" I get on with my morning routine, talking to you as I shower and put on my makeup. When you were here, you always complained about the powder on the sink—it left smudges on your jeans. I'd wrap myself in your arms and you'd laugh and kiss the top of my head and say that I was the most beautiful girl in the world and didn't need any stupid *ritual paint* on my face. I loved you so much . . .

When I get back from the office, finally finished with accounting for the day, Pen is bored nearly to death, and deeply offended that I went away for so long. There's only one way to make it up to him. I exchange my pumps for sneakers, and—looking a little like a hobo, or maybe a moron—grab the leash to take him out. Long, long ago we took this same walk together, you and me and Pen. It still feels like it was yesterday, though. It's good that I carry you in my heart this way—I don't get as lonely as I otherwise would.

We walk for an hour, chasing squirrels and fetching sticks and barking at other dogs. Pen must have had a good time, because the moment I let him in, he sinks onto his pillow and starts snoring. We—and this time I mean just you and me—we always laughed at his sleep noises, didn't we? I laugh now, but it's not the same.

I go to the bathroom to wash my hands. As I look in the mirror, I notice something weird on the shelf. A toothbrush, a green one—you loved green, didn't you? Mine is pink, sitting in its matching plastic mug. But there's another mug, a green one, with a green toothbrush poking up out of it.

"What the . . ." I don't finish the thought out loud. Pen hates swear words and starts to bark whenever I curse. And that's your doing Jimmy—the way you always hated strong language and would whistle at it whenever I used it.

I grab the mug and toss it into the drawer with the watch. Later on, when I find men's flip-flops in the living room, I just throw them out—they're rubber, they can be recycled. Happy that I've gotten rid of all the mystery trash—things I never bought or brought here—I take a nice, warm bath (oh, Jimmy, you used to wash my back, remember?), eat my diner (shrimp, which you loved) and go to bed, a bit scared of what might happen tomorrow.

"Jimmy, I need you so much!" I whisper, and close my eyes. I need you here to protect me. Yes, from a toothbrush. And whatever's lurking in the darkness under my bed.

Over the next few days, more and more items turn up. The drawer is too small to hold them all, so I bring a large cardboard box home from a nearby shop and fill it with the all the things that keep magically materializing here and there. Books, bottles of wine (you'd like them), clothes, cushions, pens and pencils, an iPad, headphones, shorts, underwear, and shoes, just to name a few. With an effort, I close the box and seal it with duct tape and drag it to the waste disposal. I wipe my left hand with my right, showing the box of trash that I'm done with it—no more mysterious stuff in my house. Pen loves to find new crap, and he chewed up a few of the socks he found, the way he likes to do, but *I'm* not enjoying this strange little adventure. I won't let anyone scare me, though. Am I doing the right thing, Jimmy? Yes, I think yes. I'm thinking of visiting a shrink, though. Seriously.

"If it happens again, off to the mental hospital to ask for some pills!" I promise Pen, and he wags his tail. He approves, and Jimmy agrees with me too, I'm sure. I need to be sure I'm in top shape, mentally, if I'm going to start looking for the practical joker who's pulling this prank. I nod forcefully and—as usual, as I do every single day—I take a bath, eat, and go to bed, following the same paths through the apartment that I always do. At some point the floor's going to be visibly

worn along those little routes. *Whatever*, I think and pull the blankets over me. *I don't have kids. Screw it. I don't have anyone to be disappointed in how I treat my floors.*

I open my eyes eight hours later when my alarm starts to beep. I roll over and switch it off, then roll back and close my eyes for a moment to think of you. Finally, I raise my lids slowly, reluctantly, because I want to stay in that imaginary world with you, forever if possible. Maybe I should consider suicide. I sigh and open my eyes and . . . here you are, right here in front of me! I'm so startled, I can't even scream or move. I just open and close my mouth, like a fish who's been hauled up out of the water into the air.

"Hey, Mary, what's up?"

"H-hi!" I reply. "What are you doing here?"

"Well, I live here!" you laugh. "Although it suddenly feels like maybe I don't, since I can't find a bunch of my stuff. You cleared some things out, right? Were you cleaning or what?" You laugh again. "My crazy Mary!"

"Sure, yeah—um, right . . ." I mumble.

"No worries." You grab my hand and kiss it. "Pen, come here!" you call, and the dog runs across the apartment, claws tip-tapping, and appears beside the bed. "Come!" you say, inviting him to jump up. The way you always did. You pet him and talk to me, but I'm not really listening.

"Why are you here?" I ask you in a whisper. "How?"

"I've always been here, babe!" You stroke my hair, brushing my bangs to the side. *The way you always did.*