

Pamela's feelings – Bella Mortimer

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Dr James P. Starlon, Ph.D., Sc.D., M.Eng., left his office in the west wing of the Cahill Center for Astronomy and Astrophysics in Caltech, California, and walked to his car. It was July 6th, 2019, and he was in a bad mood: those 86°F were upsetting him, as he was an Anchorage man, besides, it was Saturday, he was supposed to be at home, waiting for Pamela to make lunch for him. “Will I ever have the chance to meet your lovely Pam, Jimmy?”, asked Carl, his co-worker, who had parked his car next to James's. Even though they were conducting a very important investigation together, James thought that Carl was insufferable. “I don't think so, Carl. She's rather shy”, said James. He left the campus knowing that Carl had said goodbye to him with a clearly inquisitive look in his eyes. Pamela was turning into a mystery by now, and James knew it.

Dr Starlon was a low-profile man: even though he had been working there for 10 years, no one at Caltech knew a single thing about his private life. Where exactly did he live in Pasadena? How old was he when he left Alaska? How did he decide to pursue a career in mechanical engineering? What had been his motivation to change to astrophysics later on? Did he like the Lakers? Which was his favourite ice cream flavour? And, most importantly, who was Pamela Starlon, James's wife?

Of all the secrets and mysteries surrounding Dr Starlon, his wife was the biggest of them all. No one knew a single thing about her. He did not even have pictures of her at his office and, since he fervently disapproved of social networks, his co-workers hadn't yet had the chance to stalk his Facebook profile, digging for pictures of his beloved Pamela. The theories were many: some said that he was embarrassed of her because she was a low class woman who had not even graduated from middle school; others thought that she was some sort of spy working for a terrorist group; and still others even dared say that Pamela was actually a man, and James was not brave enough to come out of the closet... but, in reality, most of them simply thought that she was not real: as far as they were concerned, Pamela was a lie, an invention.

James was aware of all these rumours, and did not care in the least. His Pamela was real; they had been together for three years, now. She was the perfect wife: she cooked for him, she cleaned for him, and, most importantly, she listened to him. All his life, he had just wanted someone to listen to him when he came home tired from work, exhausted by his mediocre co-workers, who lacked the intellectual abilities he possessed. For he was better than the rest, he was brilliant, and he knew it. In Caltech, Dr Starlon felt like Sheldon Cooper did in *The Big Bang Theory's* fictional version of the university: superior.

At last, he arrived home. He lived in South Arroyo, quite far from Caltech. As he got out of his car, the smell of vegetable soup penetrated his nostrils. “What on Earth does she think she's doing?”, he thought. It was one of the hottest days of

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July, and she was making soup! “What's wrong with her?”, he said out loud, and a couple of ideas came to his mind.

The truth was that his marriage was going through a crisis. Pamela had not been at her best during those days, she was starting to have strange behaviours, and Dr Starlon was running out of ideas. He thought maybe he was the problem, maybe he was the one who was doing something wrong. But, even though he made an effort to improve, nothing seemed to change: Pamela was not the same any more. He entered the house, ready to face what he knew would come next.

“Ha! There you are, where were you? I got up and you were gone! You should've told me that you were leaving, James! I'm-”, yelled Pamela at her husband, who interrupted her quickly, “I was at the office, Carl needed me to check on the theoretical framework of our research work. I'm sorry, you're right, I should've told you I was leaving. I just wanted you to rest”. Pamela stared in silence. After some seconds, she said “I'm tired of your excuses, James!”. His answer was definite: “You know that's not true”. She did not answer. He went to the bedroom and put on some lighter clothes. The heat was increasing, and so was his anger.

“I made soup,” Pamela said, as her husband returned to the kitchen. “Yes, I noticed. What a terrible idea!” he cried. “Why? You like vegetable soup, your mother used to make it for you...”, she said, and she almost seemed surprised. His face took on the same expression he always had when someone mentioned his mother, as his mind was instantly filled with unhappy memories of his childhood: their precarious house in the corner of Strawberry Road and Huckleberry Street, the little toy shop that sold those robots he desired so much; his father beating his mother, his sister and him; his father telling him that all engineers are stupid and useless; their perpetual unhappiness and, finally, himself leaving Alaska at the age of 18, leaving his mother and his sister behind. “Yes, when we lived in Anchorage, Alaska! It's always cold there! But we're in Pasadena, in July. We're in midsummer in California and you make soup for lunch! Terrible idea! But, well, how would you know that?”. And that was the beginning of the disaster...

“You know what? I'm so sick of this, James. You're always pointing out my mistakes, but this is your fault. It's your responsibility to teach me all of this, but you're never with me, not anymore. You work, and work, and work. You keep ignoring me, I don't think you love me anymore. You hate me, that's it.” Dr Starlon could not believe his ears, she was feeling unloved! She was feeling! His irritation was now turning into curiosity; after all, he was a scientist, he had to understand what was happening to Pamela. Without wasting another minute, he leaped on her. “Don't you dare! Not again, James!”, she yelled, and then slapped him. The irritation had given way to curiosity, but now the curiosity had turned into anger and fury: suddenly, he became his father. He just could not stop himself, he began to hit her over and over again. With each punch he felt his hand would disengage from his body, but that did not stop him. It was the first time he hit someone, and the victim was his wife. He felt like a monster. He then stopped abruptly, and pushed her away. But the soup was still on the burner, and she fell right in front of it. It only took her two seconds to catch fire.

“Pamela! Pamela!”, James yelled while grabbing an extinguisher. But it was too late. Pamela was gone. After crying for thirty minutes, holding Pamela’s cold heavy hand, he knew there was only one way out. He went to his office, wrote a note, and called the police: “I’m Dr James Peter Starlon, I live in Sierra View Road, South Arroyo. I’ve killed my wife, Pamela Starlon, and I’m going to kill myself,” and without hanging up the phone, he took the gun out of the drawer and shot himself in the head.

Five minutes later, the police officers were all over the house. While some of them were in the office, removing James’s body, most of them were in the kitchen, staring in shock at Pamela. The chattering around the house showed the confusion among all the officers: “I didn’t know astrophysicists could do things like these.” “Nah, he was also a mechanical engineer.” “But this is beyond mechanics, this is genius. Apparently, she was quite functional”.

Two officers, the sergeant and a rookie, were bending down over Pamela’s melted face. Most of her body had survived, and lay there, with its silver colour and her red light bulb eyes. “What are we supposed to do with this? This is not murder, is it?”, said the younger one. “Don’t be stupid, Marcus!”, answered the sergeant, “it’s just a robot”.

