

Did You Hear About Melanie Troutt?

By

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EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY - 2013

ADULT PERRY, 18, is walking with his friends, laughing and chatting. He gets a text, pulls his phone from his pocket, and glances at it. It's from "Mom" and reads, "Did you hear about Melanie Troutt?"

He freezes, and his friends' chatter grows distant.

A FRIEND (O.S.)
Perry, dude, you okay?

INT. PERRY'S BEDROOM - DUSK - 2006

PERRY BOWMAN, 11, is at his window. ROBIN FRYE, 11, is behind him on his bed with a laptop, surfing porn on the internet.

ROBIN
(chanting to himself)
Asses, asses, asses, asses. Big ol'
butts. Giant-ass butts.

Through the window, MELANIE TROUTT, 16, crosses the adjacent yard with a shovel and starts digging. Perry watches intently.

PERRY
She's out there every night. What
is she doing?

ROBIN
The crazy girl?

PERRY
Melanie. She has a name, bruh.

ROBIN
(continuing his chant)
Crazy bitch. Giant-ass bitch.

PERRY
Shut the fuck up.

ROBIN
Melanie-smell-a-me-vagiiiina ...

Perry tackles him angrily.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Ow ow ow fuck. You're gonna break
my computer, you shitfuck. Ow.

Perry boxes his ears a few times. Robin raises his hands in surrender.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

You are one vengeful sonofabitch,
you know that?

Perry returns to the window, ignoring him. Melanie has disappeared from view.

PERRY

Dammit. She's gone.

Robin makes a mocking little face to himself as he peruses the porn.

ROBIN

I bet she's going to bury a body.

PERRY

Then where's the body, genius?

ROBIN

She's going to dig up a body.

PERRY

Then where's the body after she
digs then?

ROBIN

She hasn't found it yet.

Perry is quiet, staring out the window. After a while, Melanie reappears, still carrying the shovel, and goes into her house.

PERRY

When I'm eighteen, she'll be
twenty-three.

ROBIN

You're as weird as she is.

PERRY

You're weird. You're a butt-lover.
You want a butt on your face.

ROBIN

YessssAhdoooooo.

Perry grimaces and turns back to the window just in time to see Melanie disappear into her house.

PERRY
 (le sigh)
 She's, like ... perfect.

ROBIN
 Here we go.

PERRY
 Have you ever looked at her?

ROBIN
 (shrug)
 I'd hit it.

PERRY
 You're an animal.

ROBIN
 As are we all, my friend. As are we
 all.

INT. PERRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Perry and Robin are asleep in Perry's bed. Robin mumbles and rolls over, draping an arm over Perry.

PERRY
 (shoving him)
 Dude, get off.

Robin smiles impishly and rolls the other way.

EXT. PERRY'S HOUSE - MORNING

Perry and Robin emerge from the house with their backpacks, evidently on their way to school.

PERRY'S MOM (O.S.)
 (from inside)
 Perry, your lunch.

Perry runs back inside and emerges with his lunchbox. He then stops short as something catches his eye.

Next-door, MELANIE'S GRANDPARENTS, 60s/70s, are loading suitcases into a car. Melanie's grandfather then retrieves Melanie from the house. She looks frail and huddled as he steers her to the car.

PERRY
Where are they taking her?

ROBIN
The loony bin?

Melanie's grandfather loads her into the back of the car,
then gets into the driver's seat.

PERRY
What if she never comes back?

ROBIN
(exasperated)
Dude.

The car begins to pull away.

PERRY
(grabbing his bike off the
porch)
Dude, get your bike.

ROBIN
We have school.

PERRY
Since when do you care?

He takes off full-tilt after the car. Robin hops on his bike
and reluctantly follows.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL/SUBURBAN ROADS - MORNING - TRAVELING

Perry rides like the wind after Melanie's car, panting and
sweating. Robin is behind him, grunting and bitching.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Melanie's car pulls into the drive. Perry, exhausted,
wobbles to a halt at the curb. Robin rolls up behind him.

ROBIN
(amused)
Holy hell. I was right.

PERRY
(breathless and crestfallen)
Fuck.

He watches as Melanie's grandparents steer her inside. Some
attendants help unload her suitcases.

ROBIN
Melanie smell-a-me, gettin' a
lobotomyyy.

PERRY
That's not funny.

ROBIN
(animatedly)
Gonna cut up her brain, 'cause the
bitch is insane.

Still chanting, Robin rides his bike in a lazy circle while Perry watches the proceeding. Melanie appears to glance back at him forlornly before disappearing inside.

Melanie's grandparents emerge. Her grandfather shakes hands with a DOCTOR, middle-aged and clad in a sweater-vest/khakis ensemble, before getting in the car and driving off.

PERRY
(stunned)
They just left her.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - DAY

Perry drops his bike on the porch and pushes through the screen door, sweaty and despondent. Robin is behind him.

PERRY'S MOM, 30s, looks up from whatever she's doing, first startled, then dismayed.

PERRY'S MOM
Perry, why aren't you at school?

ROBIN
(entering behind Perry)
Yeah, Perry. Ya juvenile
delinquent.

PERRY
Mom, Melanie Troutt's grandparents
just took her to the - the -

ROBIN
The booby hatch.

PERRY'S MOM
What?

PERRY
 (dramatically)
 They just *left* her there.

PERRY'S MOM
 Slow down. Perry, where have you
 been?

PERRY
 I saw them take Melanie away and
 they left her at the *insane asylum*.
 They just left her there.

Perry's Mom sobers.

PERRY'S MOM
 What'd you do, buddy, follow them?

Perry nods.

PERRY'S MOM (CONT'D)
 Perry. Don't ever ride that far
 away from home without telling me.
 (sigh)
 The Troutts are doing the best
 thing they can for Melanie. She'll
 be all right.

PERRY
 How do you know that?

PERRY'S MOM
 Melanie has some problems, baby.
 They just want her to be where she
 ... can't hurt herself.
 (to Robin)
 I guess your parents think you're
 at school, too.

ROBIN
 I would imagine so, Mrs. Bowman.

PERRY'S MOM
 (sigh; grabbing her keys)
 Come on. I'll drive you guys over
 there. Tell them ... I don't know.
 You had food poisoning or
 something.

ROBIN
 You're super cool, Mrs. Bowman.

PERRY'S MOM
Robin Frye, quit sucking up.

ROBIN
Clever, too. Daaamn.

PERRY'S MOM
Language.

ROBIN
And principled. My dream woman.

INT. CHURCH SANCTUARY - DAY

The service is in progress. Among the other congregants are Perry and Robin, seated on the back row.

A DEACON is at the lectern reading a Bible verse. As he finishes,

DEACON
Pastor Frye?

PASTOR FRYE, 30s or 40s, takes the lectern as the deacon returns to his seat.

PASTOR FRYE
Thank you, Bob.

He lays his Bible on the lectern and opens it.

PASTOR FRYE (CONT'D)
How you folks doing this fine Sunday? I've got a tough message for you this week. Yeah. It's not a feel-good message, I'm afraid. But it's one that we all need to hear. And it's one that the Lord's been impressing on me to share with you folks, in particular the parents in our congregation. Because it's about our children - God's most precious gift.

Me and Robin had a little guy time Friday night. We grilled up some burgers, watched the game. Go, [SPORTS TEAM]. Did you see how they [AD LIB 2006 SPORTS REFERENCES]

So my boy and me, we had some quality time, enjoyed a good game. Right, buddy?

ROBIN
(disinterested)

Yup.

PASTOR FRYE
He pretends not to like me in
public.

General laughter.

PASTOR FRYE (CONT'D)
Anywho. Popular sitcom came on
after the game. We were sitting
there, relaxing, watching TV. And
this is a real popular show, one
that I know for a fact most of you
watch. And do you know what
happened in not five minutes of
that show starting? I'm sitting
there with my son, and I look up
and see this young girl kissing
another girl. On the mouth.

A few grunts of disapproval from the congregation.

PASTOR FRYE (CONT'D)
This was a prime time television
show that I'm watching with my
child. And you know what I did? I
picked up the remote and turned off
the TV and said, "Son, I'm sorry
you had to see that." Because you
know what? We owe our children - we
owe God an apology for what we've
let our society become. We're
letting the mainstream media poison
the innocent minds of our children.
You know what Robin said to me? He
said, "Dad, I thought girls only
kissed boys." And I said, "I wish,
son. I wish."

The sermon continues. The boys, meanwhile, are busy drawing
in their notebooks on the back row. Perry hits Robin on the
arm and points at his notebook. He has drawn a blueprint
labeled, "INSANE ASYLEM," complete with bushes and trees and
sidewalks. A stick figure - by the hair, obviously Melanie -
is in the dead center of the building.

Robin surveys Perry's sketch, then points to his own, which
is a crude but detailed illustration of two women having
sex. Perry rolls his eyes. A whispered conversation ensues.

PERRY
 (pointing to his drawing)
 This is important.

ROBIN
 (glances around, then leans
 toward Perry, earnest)
 So is this.

Perry punches his arm.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
 Ow.

PERRY
 How do we get her out?

Robin grabs Perry's notebook and pencil, erases Melanie, and draws her again outside the asylum walls. Then adds boobs.

Perry snatches his notebook and pencil back and begins to undo Robin's changes. Robin shrugs and resumes his own drawing.

After a beat, Perry scoots closer to Robin. Robin stops and leans in.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 We can hide in these bushes here
 and wait till the guards walk by.

Pause.

ROBIN
 Then what?

PERRY
 I don't know.

ROBIN
 (nodding)
 I like it. It'll work.

PERRY
 Maybe you run off and distract
 them. Then I run inside.

ROBIN
 I don't know if that's as good as
 the first plan.

PERRY
 (a bit loud)
 Will you be serious?

Some people on the row in front of them turn to look at them. They subside. The other congregants return their attention to the pastor, who's now ranting about deviants and sissy men and AIDS.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

The service has let out. People are walking to their cars. Perry and Robin hang around in the yard while they wait for their parents.

ROBIN
 We could beat up the guards and take their clothes. Then we just walk in wearing their clothes and be like, "Heyyyy, Maggie," to the girl at the desk. Your name will be Pedro and mine will be Armand.

PERRY
 That's it!

ROBIN
 It's a good plan, right?

PERRY
 (ignoring him)
 We pretend to be patients. Like we hide in the bushes and then jump out and act crazy, and they'll put us in the asylum.

ROBIN
 Yeah. Good. Then we'll be stuck in there too.
 (a little serious for once)
 Hey, what are you even gonna do with her?

PERRY
 Huh?

ROBIN
 When you get freakychick out of there, what are you gonna do with her?

Perry is blank.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

If you take her home, they'll just take her back. Her grandparents put her there in the first place.

PERRY

We can all run away together.

ROBIN

Yeah, right. You're a total mama's boy. You'd be crying for your mommy the first hour.

PERRY

Maybe Mom would let me keep her.

ROBIN

That's kidnapping.

PERRY

Not if she wants to live with us.

ROBIN

You can't just do that. People don't just do that.

PERRY

I don't care what people do. I gotta save her.

ROBIN

(eye roll)

Because you wanna fuck her.

PERRY

I don't wanna fuck her.

(hesitates)

I might love her.

ROBIN

You're such a faggot.

Perry kicks him. They wrestle.

PERRY'S MOM (O.S.)

Perry. Let's go.

She has just emerged from the church and is walking past with her car keys.

PERRY

Mom, can Robin come over?

PERRY'S MOM
Ask Pastor and Mrs. Frye.

INT. PERRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Perry is packing stuff into a backpack. Robin is standing there watching him.

ROBIN
You're serious about this.

PERRY
As a heart attack.

ROBIN
I don't get it. What are you going to do with her? She can't just live with you, dude.

PERRY
Once I get her here Mom won't make her go back to the asylum. She'll feel sorry for her.

ROBIN
Have you met your mother?

PERRY
(on his way out the door)
You coming or not?

Robin throws up his hands.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Perry, Robin trailing, scurries around the perimeter of the property and ducks into a cluster of bushes. Robin joins him.

ROBIN
Now what?

PERRY
We wait for the guards.

ROBIN
I don't think they have guards.

They sit in silence for a moment. Perry watches.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
I'm hungry.

Perry pulls a PBJ sandwich out of his backpack. Robin scoots over next to him and takes a bite.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
(around a mouthful of sandwich)
For real, dude. No guards.

PERRY
Then we walk into the front and act crazy.

ROBIN
We could set the building on fire.

PERRY
(appalled)
Then she'd burn up.

ROBIN
Nah, they'll all run outside. We'll be waiting with a giant net. Then we can catch some bonus crazy people.

Perry is quiet for a long time. Robin slowly realizes he's starting to cry.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Dude. Are you crying?

No answer.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Jesus. Are you on your period?

A moment of hesitation. Then he awkwardly moves closer and drapes his arm around Perry's neck, leaning his head against Perry's head.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
What's going on with you, man? Are you okay?

Perry shakes his head, unable to speak. Robin grows concerned.

ROBIN (CONT'D)
Hey, what happened? Perry?

Perry looks at him.

ROBIN (CONT'D)

What happened? Is it about your dad? He call again or something?

PERRY

(after a long pause and a deep breath)

I - I never felt this way about a girl before. And now she's gone. We have to get her out of there.

ROBIN

(recoiling)

The fuck ...

PERRY

Why can't you be serious about this? You're supposed to be my best friend.

ROBIN

Me be serious? What the fuck is the big deal about this girl? You barely know her at all, she's five years older than you, *and she's crazy*. Actually crazy.

Perry knocks the sandwich out of his hand and pushes him.

PERRY

Take it back.

They scuffle, for real this time.

ROBIN

Fuck you! You're so fucking stupid. All this over a stupid *bitch*.

PERRY

(raging)

Take it back!

ROBIN

(shoving him)

What's the big deal about girls anyway?!

A pause in the scuffling. They stare at each other, Perry puzzled, Robin desperate.

PERRY

Who're you to talk?! All you ever talk about is girls, girls -

Robin leans in to kiss him. Perry recoils in horror and scrambles to his feet.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 (disgusted)
 What the fuck, man?!

Robin stares at him, frozen; then turns on his heel and runs. Perry stares after him, trying to process what just happened.

A long beat.

MELANIE (O.S.)
 I know you.

Perry turns, slack-jawed, to look at her. She is disheveled and hollow-eyed, dressed in pale blue scrubs, a white robe, and slip-on shoes. Her hair hangs over her face like curtains.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON - LATER

Melanie and Perry sit quietly at opposite ends of a bench. Melanie is picking dirt from under her fingernails. Perry surveys some patches of upturned earth where she's been digging.

After a time,

PERRY
 Y-you remember me?

MELANIE
 (it's obvious)
 You live next-door.

PERRY
 Oh, yeah.

More silence. Perry watches Melanie's hands.

PERRY (CONT'D)
 Why are you ...

She looks at him. He falls silent.

MELANIE
 ... Always digging?

PERRY

Yeah.

She looks away.

MELANIE

(distantly)

I lost something.

PERRY

Oh. That ... kind of makes sense.

MELANIE

You're the first person to ever think so.

He is mildly satisfied at this. Then,

PERRY

I ... I think my friend's mad at me.

MELANIE

I heard the yelling.

PERRY

If I tell you something, will you promise not to tell anybody, ever?

MELANIE

(solemn)

I'll take your secret to the grave.

PERRY

He ... uh.
(shudder; spits it out)
He tried to kiss me.

MELANIE

On the lips?

PERRY

(miserably)

Yeah.

MELANIE

That's romantic.

PERRY

(incredulous)

No. It's *not*.

Melanie regards him and tilts her head. After a beat,

MELANIE

How sad.

She looks away. After another silence,

PERRY

So ... they just let you walk
around outside here?

MELANIE

No. I escaped.

PERRY

You what?

MELANIE

(proud of herself)

This girl was having a breakdown,
and I sneaked out while the
orderlies were restraining her.
It's the third time I've done it
this week.

(pause)

They'll probably come looking for
me soon.

PERRY

Why don't you run?

MELANIE

(shrug)

I can't hide. You can run, but you
can't hide. Running hurts my knees.

Perry puzzles over this.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

My knees hurt now. That means
there's going to be a frost.

(pause; regretfully)

It'll kill the blooming things.

Silence. After a beat, she looks at him abruptly. Intensely.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

He's alone in the dark. Under the
dirt. You have to find him.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - VESTIBULE - LATE AFTERNOON - 2013

We're in the present again. Adult Perry enters the house and drops his duffel bag on the floor.

ADULT PERRY

Mom?

PERRY'S MOM

Hey, baby.

She appears and hugs him, then picks up his bag. They proceed into the house.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MINUTES LATER

Adult Perry and Perry's mom are sitting at the kitchen table. Adult Perry nurses a chocolate milk. An uneaten sandwich sits on a napkin in front of him.

PERRY'S MOM

It was some kind of infection. Poor girl didn't stand a chance. They're saying there could've been neglect on the part of the hospital. There's an investigation underway. It's bad business.

Perry is silent.

EXT. PERRY'S HOUSE - NIGHT - LATER

Adult Perry emerges into the yard carrying a shovel. He crosses into the Troutts' yard.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON - 2006

Melanie and Perry are still sitting on the bench. An ORDERLY emerges from the front of the hospital, accompanied by a POLICE OFFICER.

ORDERLY

There you are, Miss Melanie. Who's your friend?

(to the officer)

Is that the kid?

OFFICER

I think so.

Melanie eyes the police officer and shrinks away. The orderly goes to her.

ORDERLY

Don't worry, sugar. He's not here for you.

He begins to usher her back inside.

OFFICER

(to Perry)

Are you Perry Bowman?

PERRY

(scared)

Yes, sir.

OFFICER

You're not in trouble, okay? Your mom's been looking for you. Come on with me. I'll give you a ride home.

MELANIE

(beginning to panic)

Perry. Perry, you have to find him. He's all alone in the dark.

EXT. TROUTT HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT - 2013

The yard is covered in holes now.

Still digging, Adult Perry finally hits something.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON - 2006

The orderly steers Melanie away.

ORDERLY

Come on, sugar. Time for your pills.

MELANIE

(gibbering as she's led away)

Look under the dirt. He's all alone in the dark ... bring him to me, please, promise ...

EXT. TROUTT HOUSE - BACKYARD - NIGHT - 2013

Adult Perry unearths a tattered shoe box. Opening it, he finds a skeletal cat inside, still wearing its collar and license, along with a gaily painted dish and a few cat toys. Taped to the inside of the box top is a photo of a smiling child - Melanie - hugging the living cat.

EXT. MENTAL HOSPITAL - AFTERNOON - 2006

Perry and the officer watch until Melanie and the orderly are out of sight.

OFFICER

Poor kid.

He looks at Perry.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

All right. Come on, buddy.

He pats Perry on the back as they head for the car.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON - LATER

The sun is low and casting orange shadows across the house. Perry's mom sits alone in the dark in her robe, crying.

A knock on the door.

OFFICER (O.S.)

Ms. Bowman?

She jumps up and hurries to the door. The officer enters with Perry. She grabs him and hugs him tightly.

PERRY

(alarmed)

Mom ... what's wrong?

EXT. CEMETERY - PREDAWN - 2013

Adult Perry carries the shoe box and shovel toward the cemetery. He finds a fresh grave marked "Melanie Troutt."

After a deep breath, he digs a shallow hole in the fresh dirt of the grave and places the shoe box inside, then covers the box with dirt.

He then turns, reluctantly, to look toward another grave down the way.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON - 2006

Perry's mom holds him close. A silence, then the officer speaks.

OFFICER
You know your friend, Robin Frye?
The preacher's boy?

Perry speechlessly nods.

EXT. CEMETERY - PREDAWN - 2013

Adult Perry leaves his shovel and paces slowly down the lane toward the other grave.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON - 2006

OFFICER (CONT'D)
We're ... not sure exactly what
happened. But he was home alone
this afternoon and got ahold of his
daddy's gun ...

EXT. CEMETERY - PREDAWN - 2013

Silence. Adult Perry comes to a slow halt in front of the grave and stares at it as if for the first time.

OFFICER (V.O.)
He didn't make it, son. I'm sorry.

INT. PERRY'S HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON - 2006

Loud silence. All we see is the back of Perry's head as the sun fades.

EXT. CEMETERY - PREDAWN - 2013

CLOSE ON

The grave, revealing the inscription: "Robin Nicholas Frye, Beloved Son. 1995-2006."

It's first light. Adult Perry lowers to a crouch, then sits, Indian style. He touches the headstone lightly with his fingers, then sits back and hugs his knees to his chest.

ROLL CREDITS

EXT. TROUTT HOUSE - BACKYARD - EARLY MORNING - UNDER CREDITS

Melanie's grandfather emerges onto the deck wearing a wife-beater and clutching a cup of coffee. He takes a sip from his cup, then freezes and lets the liquid fall from his mouth, staring, stunned, over the yard.

He hustles urgently back into the house and reemerges with his wife, who is equally flabbergasted at what she sees.

WIDE to reveal the pair standing on the deck in the light of the breaking dawn, surveying a lawn riddled with the holes Perry dug the night before.

CROSS FADE TO

INT. CHURCH - DAY - UNDER CREDITS

Service is underway. Pastor Frye is in the pulpit. He is more sober now; less glib than the last time we saw him.

PASTOR FRYE

Life is short. No matter who you are, what you believe, your skin color or lifestyle choice or what have you, we're all gonna face death and loss. And this inevitability of suffering and loss is what binds us all together.

In light of that, let me urge you all to heed the words of Jesus in Mark 12:31: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Not, love the people who look like you or think like you or act like you. Just, "Love your neighbor." Simple as that.

FADE TO BLACK