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Dramatic Publishing

WHO LOVES YOU, JIMMIE ORRIO?

A Play

by

CHERYLDEE HUDDLESTON



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(WHO LOVES YOU, JIMMIE ORRIO?)

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Marin Theatre Company presented the world premiere of *Who Loves You, Jimmie Orrio?* on February 1, 2001, Mill Valley, California. Artistic Director: Lee Sankowich, Managing Director: James A. Kleinmann. The production was directed by Barbara Bosch and included the following:

CAST

(in order of appearance)

Melinda Johnson STACY ROSS
Leonard Pager HANSFORD PRINCE
Jessica Johnson ROBERTA CALLAHAN
J.T. ELIZABETH CALOGERO
Jimmie Orrio CHAD FISK

PRODUCTION STAFF

Scenic and Costume Design DUSTIN O'NEILL
Lighting Design KIMBERLY SCOTT
Sound Design. CLIFF CARRUTHERS
Stage Manager ERIKA H. SELLIN
Solo Guitar JIM NICHOLS

Who Loves You, Jimmie Orrio?

A Full-length Play
For 2 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS

MELINDA JOHNSON: Between 30 and 45. Her agelessness may have to do with the fact that she doesn't speak, the long flannel nightgown that she always wears or the fact that her mother drank too much moonshine during her pregnancy. Underneath Melinda's long tangle of hair hides an imprint on her forehead, whose form and origin are up for discussion.

JESSICA JOHNSON: Melinda's mother, 50 to 65. Frail and small, with a fierce sexuality that can wilt small plants. She has the habit of sucking on her finger or tapping her teeth.

JIMMIE ORRIO: In his late 20s. His last, and short-lived job was on the rodeo circuit. He is that kind of American man who, when frustrated by life, reverts to smiling too much and getting too angry at odd moments. Women of all ages watch the way he walks. He is almost half Italian.

LEONARD PAGER: An African-American, in his 50s to 60s, also somewhat ageless. He is used to not taking part in most conversations but instead prefers to walk past the brawl or close the door quietly in the room where people are making love. Yet he is the man who will be

found at the side of the road tending to the dog broadsided and left to die. He is a healer. And maybe something more.

J. T.: A 12- or 13-year-old girl who wears overalls which successfully hide her gender. She lives with her mother. She is, against all reason, an optimistic girl.

TIME: After the Civil War, before the escalation of the Vietnam War and around the time of the Steve McQueen western, *Nevada Smith*. 1966. Late spring.

SETTING: A trailer park in Cookeville, Tennessee. Cookeville is the town where white people live. Its neighbor, Algood, is the town where black people live.

Approximate running time: 90 minutes

The residents of the crumbling trailer park in Cookeville, Tennessee have had a busy twenty-four hours. Middle-aged, white Jessica has had an overnight guest--Leonard, an African-American man on his way to neighboring Algood: Melinda, Jessica's mute daughter, reputed to be a witch, has tried to speak and, in doing so, has punched her abusive mother in the nose. J.T., a 12-year-old partner in Melinda's witchery, alone is witness to Leonard's mysterious healing of her speechless friend. And, Jimmie Orrio has finally come home from jail. Jimmie Orrio, whom Melinda loves and has been waiting a year for, has returned ... with a new wife in his old trailer. And now, after all the excitement, J.T. finds herself alone in the yard of the trailer park.

J.T. Don't you got nowhere else to eat breakfast, Leonard? If you do, you oughta go there, I'm tellin' ya. *She's the witch.*

(LEONARD carefully opens the Mason jar, checks to see if the sediment has dropped, and takes a drink, puts the lid back.)

LEONARD. She ain't the only one around here, chile.

J.T. Yeah? *(LEONARD contemplates the Mason jar, puts it back in his carpetbag and starts up the steps of the Johnson trailer.)* What'd you do to Melinda back there?

(LEONARD puts his walking stick against the trailer and limps over to J.T. He puts his hands on her shoulders, then places his palm against her throat. J.T. takes a sudden, audible breath in and a slow, sweet breath out. She smiles at LEONARD, who chuckles and goes back to his walking stick. He turns back to J.T.)

LEONARD. J.T., you got you a brown recluse spider handy? *(LEONARD smiles slowly as J.T. laughs in surprise. LEONARD walks up the steps and exits into JESSICA's trailer.)*

J.T. *(as though calling to MELINDA in the "woods").* Melinda...Melinda, if you was my mama...you bein' a witch...we could both be flyin' through the air nights...singin'...or yellin' things at folkses. Mebbe we'd *smack* 'em right up side the head like you did back there...whichever one we feel like doin'...our clothes flyin' through the breeze and our feet stuck out in the night...ooh, our feet's cold and our fingers is warm... *(She goes*

over to Jimmie Orrio's trailer and goes over the writing with her fingers.) Jimmie Orrio, you know, he's a hero for all horses. He's walkin' through the rodeo just like Steve McQueen in Nevada Smith...walkin' and not talkin' and makin' little dustballs with his boots...he's just walkin'...like he ain't even tryin' to be how he is... (J.T. covers her eyes and giggles like a little girl.)

JIMMIE ORRIO (*from offstage*). You got a match on you?

J.T. (*quickly*). Sure, I think.

(Excited, J.T. runs around looking for a match as JIMMIE ORRIO enters from out of his trailer. He wears jeans and a T-shirt, carries socks, his cowboy boots and a shirt in one hand and a cigarette in the other.)

JIMMIE. You got one?

J.T. Naw. I told a whopper.

(JIMMIE puts his shirt on and sticks the cigarette in the breast pocket.)

JIMMIE. That's okay. I just wanted out.

J.T. But you just got in. Won't your wife get lonely?

JIMMIE. Naw, that's all right, she fell asleep. (*Smiling at J.T.*) She'll call me for lunch.

J.T. (*laughing*). Shoot, Jimmie Orrio, you are a mess.

JIMMIE (*rubs his feet on the ground*). Ground feels good.

(J.T. puts her feet on top of JIMMIE's feet.) What you doin'?

J.T. Touchin' your feet. (*Blurting it out.*) You just missed the fight.

JIMMIE. Tell me what?

J.T. (*backing off*). Them ole boots o' yours still smell like horses, Jimmie Orrio. (*Sniffing at him.*) The rest of you smells kind of funny.

JIMMIE. I woulda showered if I'd'a known your nose was that good, J.T. (*Beat.*) Wish I had me a match.

J.T. Want me to go find you one?

JIMMIE. No, that's all right. I kinda like lookin' at your pointy ole face, J.T.

J.T. Yeah?

JIMMIE. You got yourself older, didn't ya? Your face skinned up. You got your period yet?

J.T. Last month!

JIMMIE. Yep. Figures.

J.T. Got it right at school. Made a big ole puddle so I got to go home. (*Beat.*) Well, not a *big* ole puddle—

(*JIMMIE gives a laugh and tilts his head back, closes his eyes.*)

JIMMIE. God, it feels good here. Ain't even that much of a place and it sure feels damned good.

J.T. You really married?

JIMMIE. Tell me what?

J.T. You really married?

JIMMIE. Sort of.

J.T. But remember what you said before—

JIMMIE. That's right, I ain't stuck.

J.T. Like glue.

JIMMIE. Wish I had me a drink.

J.T. (*eagerly, getting up*). But it's the mornin' still.

JIMMIE (*smiling slowly*). That's why I wish I had me a drink.

(J.T. hesitates, then unseen by JIMMIE ORRIO, opens up LEONARD's carpetbag and takes out the Mason jar.)

J.T. You think your wife's pretty?

JIMMIE. I *married* her. *(J.T. walks over to him with the Mason jar. To himself, rather surprised...)* I married her.

J.T. *(hands him the jar)*. You think Melinda's pretty?

JIMMIE. This my moonshine?

J.T. Well...it ain't *exactly*—

JIMMIE *(not hearing her)*. Tell me what? *(Pleased.)* Damn, that's right... Forgot I'd hid it. *(Beat.)* Surprised it didn't blow up all this time passin'... *(Unscrewing the lid gingerly.)* No tellin' what it'll do to my throat... *(He grins at J.T.)* ...might render me speechless...

J.T. Supposin' that what happened to Melinda? *(As JIMMIE looks down into the jar.)* Can I drink some after you? Aw now, just a sip—

JIMMIE. Girl, you wanna stop your periods before they barely get startin'? Let's see now...shew...smells like somethin' died or got born... *(Tipping the jar up to his mouth.)* Let's just see what we got here...this oughta save my soul... *(He drinks and his eyes screw up of their own accord.)* That's it, I'm blind—

J.T. You really blind?

JIMMIE *(his eyes open, winking)*. Tell me what?

J.T. Oh now, you're always sayin' that, Jimmie Orrio, you always sayin', "Tell me what?" like that...don't you never listen to nobody?

JIMMIE. Not much. Don't want to use up my time. A fella in jail...well, he told me that people is only really alive, one hundred percent livin'...maybe thirty seconds a day...

J.T. You savin' up for somethin' big?

JIMMIE. Mebbe. (*Coughing as he takes a drink.*) I think this stuff'll make me start my period...

J.T. Don't take much moonshine to make you start coughin', huh, Jimmie Orrio.

JIMMIE. Don't take much much moonshine to make me... (*As the effect of what is in the Mason jar hits him.*) ...stop rememberin 'what I was...was...talkin'...about...whew—

J.T. So...didn't ya hear me...do you think Melinda's pretty?

JIMMIE. Tell me what?

J.T. I bet you heard that time.

JIMMIE. Hard to say if she's pretty or not.

J.T. How come?

JIMMIE. 'Cause she's crazy. So mainly you see she's crazy.

J.T. I think she's real pretty. (*Beat.*) And she's a *witch*. (*Beat.*) I got to touch her bosoms.

JIMMIE. I heard that. (*Beat.*) She let you touch her...bosoms?

J.T. I asked her if I could and she let me.

JIMMIE. You're a girl.

J.T. I don't have any yet. I wanted to know what they feel like.

JIMMIE. What'd they feel like?

J.T. Sort of like a bowl of mashed potatoes. (*Beat.*) Ain't you never felt any before, Jimmie Orrio?

JIMMIE. Not when they was in a bowl.

J.T. Wanna feel mine?

JIMMIE. Nope.

J.T. How come?

JIMMIE. No-o-ope.

J.T. So you think Melinda might be pretty. Pretty as some horses?

JIMMIE (*stretches, he is really feeling the effects*). Tell me what...yeah, that's right, pretty as some horses...first horse

...first horse I ever seen...first horse I ever seen was my rocking horse...had her till I left her out in the rain and she warped all up like she was crippled. (*Beat.*) One of her hooves had already got broke... split up the middle—

J.T. Did you shoot her?

(*JIMMIE glances at the words, “I Love You, Jimmie Orrio” scrawled across his trailer.*)

JIMMIE (*absently, to himself*). Pretty as some horses...yep, she sure was pretty, though...she sure was...

J.T. Was your cell real small? (*A pause.*) Do you feel bad that you done it?

JIMMIE. Nope. Felt bad when they put me in that cell. (*Looking down at the Mason jar, to himself.*) Surprised I had me any moonshine left. Figured I'd drunk it all that night...Jesus, I was sure drunk that night...was so drunk that when the sheriff picked me up, I was passed out and my clothes half off me. Nope, didn't figure I had anything left from that night...spooky...

J.T. (*wanting to comfort him*). Yeah...but you're a hero for all horses, Jimmie Orrio.

JIMMIE. Tell me what?

J.T. What'd you do to that cowboy?

JIMMIE. It were in the papers, wasn't it? Well, you read, doncha?

J.T. Yeah. But I like to ask questions I already know the answers to.

JIMMIE. Naw, I don't want to talk about it.

J.T. Bet you can't guess who wrote “I Love You, Jimmie Orrio” on your trailer there.

JIMMIE. Bet I can.

J.T. Does it make you embarrassed?

JIMMIE. Nope. (*He takes a drink.*) What they write in the papers?

J.T. Well...that you got yourself into a fight with this cowboy—

JIMMIE. Fight? Is that how they wrote it...“fight”?

J.T. I think so...I think that’s what they—

JIMMIE (*interrupting, driven*). Well, you said you read it, did they write “fight” or did they write some other way—

J.T. “Fight.” They wrote it “fight.” *Jeez*—

JIMMIE. What they write in the paper about what the cowboy was doin’—

J.T. (*nervous*). Well—

JIMMIE. *J.T.*—

J.T. I’m tryin’ to think—

JIMMIE. Talk to me, girl, did they all of ‘em write in the paper what the cowboy—

J.T. They wrote he was breakin’ this horse...Jimmie Orrio, you’re gettin’ all red—

JIMMIE. They wrote he was “breakin’ the horse”...that’s how they wrote it...them exact words “breakin’ the horse”?

J.T. That’s right, that’s right how they wrote it, Jimmie Orrio. And then they said y’all got into a fight with the cowboy and that you shot him...twice...in the general area of his collarbone—

JIMMIE. What else...about the horse what else did they’all write about the horse—

J.T. Didn’t really write any more about the horse too much...but somebody...somebody part of the rodeo said you was a hero for all horses or somethin’ like that...

but mainly they was writin' about you and the cowboy and they wrote that the cowboy—

JIMMIE. Did they write he was a MEAN FUCKIN' SON OF A BITCH?

J.T. (*small*). No.

JIMMIE (*attempting mildness*). Well, they should have. (*He grabs his socks and boots, throws them down and shoves his feet into them.*) Yep...the rodeo was a mistake...

J.T. But you the best rider in Tennessee, Jimmie Orrio. (*Pause, then slowly.*) What that cowboy do to that horse?

(*A pause. JIMMIE, his face dark, stands up and walks away from her.*)

JIMMIE (*very slowly, preoccupied with unpleasant visions*). Tell me what.

J.T. What that cowboy do—

JIMMIE (*half mumbling, cutting her off*). Tell me— (*Beat.*) Stopped walkin'. Stopped walkin' 'cause I'd never heard me a sound like that...it's like everything quit 'ceptin' for that sound...turned myself 'round to the corral and then I...funniest sound I ever heard...

J.T. The cowboy was makin' a funny sound? What kind of sound? Was he yellin' somethin'?

JIMMIE. The horse. (*Pause.*) Was the horse. The horse was makin' the funny sound...

J.T. (*slowly*). Was the horse yellin'?

JIMMIE. Not yellin'. (*Pause.*) Couldn't yell. (*A long pause.*) Just kept makin' it...

J.T. (*a little scared*). The funny sound?

JIMMIE. Kept on makin' it...makin' it... (*A long pause.*)

J.T. You need maybe to go inside for a while and lay down?

JIMMIE (*trying to shake it off*). Naw...she'll call me for lunch. (*A pause.*)

J.T. (*with false cheeriness*). Bet you think it's me, doncha?

JIMMIE. Tell me what?

(MELINDA enters unseen. She has brushed her hair and gotten at least most of the tangles out and tied it back with a bedraggled ribbon. Her bangs still hide the print on her forehead.)

J.T. Bet you think it's me wrote that on your trailer.

JIMMIE. I know it's you. It was you a year ago the night the sheriff drug me off and it was you last night.

J.T. But you don't know if it's *from* me, Jimmie Orrio.

JIMMIE. Naw, I know you love me, J.T.

J.T. (*embarrassed*). Naw. Not me.

(A pause as JIMMIE stares down into the moonshine.)

JIMMIE (*a realization*). You know...I don't want to work with horses no more. I don't wanna *work* horses. I don't want to cinch a saddle around 'em, or put a bit between their teeth or dig my boot heels into their sides or make 'em *go* anywhere. I just want to watch 'em...run...stand still and flick their tails...head to head the way they do, like friends talkin' without no talkin'... (*Beat.*) Take this stuff, will ya? (*He does not let go of the jar.*) Had me a buckskin mare five years ago. Used to lay my forehead against her head at the end of a long day...that coarse hair between her eyes was all wet and silky and she'd make a little whinny deep in her throat and press back against my forehead...press her head right up against...

nope... *(Beat.)* Nope...nope, that mare was too spooky ...shied on her left side all the damned time...horses—they're too damned fuckin' spooky...let somebody else fool with the stupid...spooky... *(He drops down to the ground, leans up against a tree stump.)* Nope, I ain't gonna work horses no more... *(He picks something off the heel of his boot.)* And no more moonshine neither... *(Rubbing the "something" on his jeans, mumbling.)* Manure. *(Chuckling.)* Perfume... *(Beat, gesturing with the jar.)* Take this stuff, will ya?

(J.T. puts her hand around the jar but JIMMIE does not let go of it. His eyes begin to close.)

J.T. *(letting go of the jar).* Maybe you saw me write it, but...maybe I write it for somebody else...

JIMMIE *(sleepily).* Tell me what?

J.T. *(thinking better of what she said).* I said...what work you gonna do now, Jimmie Orrio, if you ain't gonna work horses?

JIMMIE. Got me a job with my new wife's Daddy. In Baton Rouge. Mixin' paint in a paint store.

J.T. When you goin' to Baton Rouge? You goin'?

JIMMIE. I guess. *Yeah* I'm goin'... Soon as I fix that fu—...spooky carburetor in her truck I'm goin'. *(JIMMIE's head drops down. He is asleep.)*

J.T. *(whispering).* Jimmie Orrio? *(J.T. looks up and sees MELINDA.)* I didn't tell him, Melinda. I sort of did but I didn't... *(MELINDA smiles and shakes her head, her eyes never leaving JIMMIE ORRIO, her face soft. She breathes shallowly.)* Your hair's all smooth. *(J.T. starts to exit into her trailer.)* Melinda...I'm gonna go in and

check on Mama. (*Beat.*) Y'all make me feel kind of... damp.

(She goes up the stairs and then exits into her trailer. MELINDA circles JIMMIE, kneels down next to him, then carefully, barely breathing, lays down in the crook of his body, her face inches away from his. She reaches her fingers up and strokes his hair when JIMMIE awakes with a start, doesn't know where he is, and grabs MELINDA and, pushing her onto the ground, presses his body on top of her. It is preparation for a fight, not sex, and it's clear that he doesn't know where he is. He looks down at her and, through the moonshine, struggles to figure out who it is.)

JIMMIE. Shit...who the hell are— *(She arches up to him and kisses him full on the mouth. He at first responds a little, but then pulls back from her.)* What the hell... Melinda? *(He gets up from her and starts laughing. MELINDA sits up.)*

MELINDA *(without thinking)*. It's me. *(He does not hear her. MELINDA feels her mouth with her fingers, laughs in joy to herself.)*

JIMMIE *(still laughing, walking away from her)*. I mean, I gotta draw the line somewhere...Shee-Jesus... *(Rubbing his mouth.)* What's all over my mouth...what you been doin', Melinda, suckin' on cotton candy—

MELINDA *(as if convincing herself, loud, her voice harsh)*. IT'S ME.

(JIMMIE turns around to her. They stare at one another, then he looks back at the writing on his trailer and back