

Chapter 1: You've Gotta Eat Your Spinach Baby

The jig is up, the news is out, they've finally found me...

I've never got arrested before. Always saw myself as a goody two shoes nice guy kind of person. I never got into fights, I talk my way out of trouble, and I weaken enemies with my charm. The police took me to their nearest jail cell, where I would stay until a court hearing is set. Gertrude Temple was said to be preparing a lawsuit against me, or something like that. Well, I did get caught touching the naked bodies of her daughter and her daughter's friend. But what do they know, eh? It's not like I was raping them or anything. I was pretty sure me, Shirley, and Mary Lou were having so much fun. Perhaps too much fun, too much fun always seems to end abruptly and messily.

But then again, I liked to believe that I am a genius, a prodigy, a guy who's always one step ahead. Well, let me ask you: do you really think I could have prepared for something like this?

Of course I could, and I have.

I'm just waiting for it to come into motion. It may take some time, and chaos theory states that there still a chance it won't happen at all. If that would be the case, then I would be one unlucky son of a bitch.

[Griff's point of view, the day during Mary Lou's visit]

It's not easy looking after a kid, but then again that's a given, but it's not easy looking after a famous kid who goes around finding trouble. I warned Shirley about that man Jonathan, that he's most likely lying through his teeth. His story was complete bullshit; I don't believe one word of it. And yet, that little child star just seems to be head over heels for him. What a pain in my ass.

Today her stand-in Mary Lou and the girl's mom visited Gertrude. Both mothers are so busy conversing that they didn't notice the suspicious man from upstairs that managed to get himself a job as Shirley's sitter. He's so full of himself, and carries the arrogance of a royalty; he's been trying to act nice and humble all this time, but I can tell he's one of those men who's too full of themselves. Speak of the devil; he's making his way to me, hands in his pockets like he owns the world. This walking smug in the black

coat and tie is really getting on my nerves, and my gut tells me there's a good reason for that, I just don't know it yet. I just hope I'm wrong when I thought he's got a second agenda regarding Shirley, but then again I'm often right.

We chatted for less than a minute; I pretty much shrug him off with hateful words. I honestly didn't want to talk to this man, I'm just sure that I can't trust anything that comes out of his mouth.

I felt him drop something in my pocket. Its heavy enough for me to feel its weight, but I can't take it out here in the living room, who knows it may be a bomb or something. I waited for my chance to slip away. The two little girls dragged Jonathan away from me and into Shirley's room, so I used that chance to go out back.

Once in the backyard, I nervously took out whatever the man dropped in my pocket, hoping to God it doesn't explode. I stared with utter amusement and curiosity at the small rectangular object in my hand. It looks like a device, and my heart was in my throat thinking that it may be a new kind of bomb. That feeling changed when I saw that the device had an image covering most of its front. The image was bright, like something was illuminating it from behind. Even stranger was that the image was of Shirley's, except it looks like her and doesn't look like her at the same time. The picture was colorized and Shirley's face looks...older.

I went a little farther from the house just in case this thing still decides to explode. The device started to vibrate and I wanted so bad to throw it far away, but saner and curious heads prevailed. It was another image cascaded over Shirley's picture, with a message on it:

- [OK] -

I had no idea what to do. There were no buttons to press in this device, unless it wanted me to press the “OK” image itself? That asshole Jonathan must be playing a prank on me, we all know you can’t press a picture and expect it to react. Feeling stupid, I pressed the picture of “OK” anyway. I almost screamed when another picture popped up and started talking. Well the picture was just a background with images appearing while a voice record seems to be playing. Come to think of it, this feels like one of those movie narrations that they use in the silver screen. Is this device a miniature theatre? The voice was undoubtedly Jonathan’s, and the words were typing as fast as he tells it:

"Hello Griff. I know you don't trust me, and there's actually a good reason for that. I'm not from around here. But I wasn't lying when I said I meant no harm to Shirley, I care about her- I truly do. I'm from the future, and as unbelievable as that is let me prove it to you. This picture of Shirley you're seeing? That was taken during the year 1940, when she was 12 years old. I'm from the year 2013, and I've read Shirley's autobiography a million times; it's safe to say that I'm quite a fan. Anyway, I stumbled onto her autobiography which would explain how I know so much about her life. That includes you, and on a side note I would like to say that you will be replaced by the time she turns 14 by a guy named Palmtree or something, so, yeah. "

I grimaced, all this is quite a shocker but it's the only thing that makes sense right now, plus it was disturbing to know that I will be replaced in eight years. I had no choice but to believe him, but did he have to do all this to gain my trust, he doesn't strike me like the kind of guy who will tell the truth without a big trade-off. Oh wait, it's not yet done:

"Point is, if you still can't trust me after all I said, at least trust Shirley. I told her everything about me, and I'm leaving it up to her whether to keep me company or not. Lastly, I may need your help sometime in the near future. Keep this cellphone with you at all times; it will vibrate if I need you, and hopefully you'll respond."

That was all the message said, I have so many questions I wanted to ask him, but I'm not sure when or how to ask. I decided I could excuse him from the girls and ask him personally what he meant.

I went upstairs 'cause I know that's where they would playing. I stopped in my tracks, however, when I overheard them talking.

"That wasn't sex, sweetheart", that sounded like Jonathan. How he could've gotten to that topic, I don't want to know, but I'm deeply disturbed by how the phrase sounded like. It sounded like they just finished doing something that was mistaken for sex. I decided to listen closer to make sure I wasn't hallucinating or something. What I heard was Jonathan explaining to the kids what sex was, but the worst part was Shirley saying something like they haven't done it yet, which pretty much sounds like they were trying. I couldn't handle anymore and stayed away from the walls to hear as less as possible. I had hoped I could trust Jonathan after what his "<i>cellphone</i>" did, but time traveller or not he's just another child molester after all. I was still right about not trusting him.

I readied my gun just in case, but I had no intention of shooting him. There was so much I got to ask him, if either of us survives this encounter. I backed away from the door and collected my thoughts, I had to make a decision. I used an installed alarm in the master's bedroom that can be activated to alert the authorities in case an emergency happened to the family. I don't care who this guy thinks he is, he tried to literally fuck with the girl I'm guarding, and he's going down.

I kicked the door open, pistol aimed at the ready. I saw two naked little girls on the bed and a man with his hands on their crotch. Everything else that follows is, as they say, history.

[Griff's point of view, after the incident]

I visited Jonathan in his temporary prison; once the court hearing is done he will be sent very far away. Even behind bars, he still has that high and mighty atmosphere around him, sitting on his prison bed, his arms resting on his thighs and his hands clasped. He stood up, crossed his arms, and walked closer to the bars with a grin on his face.

"I don't remember calling for help, yet", he said, "I'm assuming you listened to my message?"

"I did", I replied, "but there's a lot of things I wanted to ask. One particular question really keeps pestering me, the most important question."

"And that is?"

"What are you really doing here?"

He just smiled at me—that devilish smile, oh how I hated that smile. It reminded me of a devil that just finished doing his dirty deeds.

"Have you talked to Shirley yet?" , he asked, and for once his face seemed to show humanity, looks to me like Shirley's the only thing he cares about if he ever knew how to care.

"Not yet, she wouldn't come out of her room", I answered, "Her mother's worried that she's scarred for life."

"No thanks to you."

"DON'T MAKE THIS MY FAULT!" , I lost my composure and shouted at him with both hands clutching at the bars. The officers approached me but I told them off, told them it was okay, but we all know it ain't.

Jonathan sat down again on his bed, and motioned me to leave.

"Cool down for the meantime, will ya?" , he said, remaining calm and unaffected as always, "Just talk to Shirley and wait for my call."

What's that supposed to mean? I tried to ask him but he doesn't answer, he just sat there with his eyes closed. Who knows what he's doing, but something tells me I won't understand. That's just the kind of man he is, that man of mystery who fakes his feelings and does everything with a calm expressionless face. If you ask me, the scariest kind of man is the one you can never understand. And that's just the kind of man Jonathan is.

The scary kind.

Chapter 2: Picture Me Without You

This life ain't over we still got something to save...

[Martin's point of view, year 2013]

I just finished telling Jonathan the consequences of his action, here's hoping he actually does something about it. Then again, the man's a prodigy; I've seen him get himself out of a bind creatively and in the most unexpected way. I just hope he doesn't mess history up too much. There are so many things I don't understand, like how can I remember the original version of history instead of the one rewritten with Jonathan in it?

I decided to check the newspaper again, see if the headlines didn't change. It didn't, it still stated that he was arrested for doing things to Shirley Temple. That's weird, he would've done something about that already, this is Jonathan we're talking about here.

I flipped around the other archives of newspapers, something caught my eye. It was a later news report, 5 months after his arrest. Strange writings were said to have been found in his cell, hieroglyphs and whatnot. A picture was attached, it was indeed a prison cell's wall(I think) , and to a normal person it contained nonsensical symbols all etched together. The thing is, when we were in high school, me and Jonathan decided to make our own secret coded language just for kicks. Son of a bitch actually used it for real this time. Basically, it read: "A LITTLE HELP? TIMEX IS HERE, GIVE IT BACK LATER"

After that sentence was a bunch of symbols that translated to a bunch of numbers. What was he trying to tell me? Numbers, numbers, numbers. "Timex is here" plus numbers means... coordinates? Sometimes I think my best friend is too smart for his own good, here's hoping it saves his life this time.

I checked the map for said coordinates and guess where he kept the watch? The same park where we decided to meet a few days ago. After going to the park, I almost chuckled to myself when I realized that he buried the device exactly where we stood when we were discussing the fact that he's about to use a time machine. Luckily I brought a mini shovel with me, and as much as I hate the disapproving glances of passers-by, I dug. All I found was a small box, enough to fit a wristwatch I suppose and true enough my time machine wristwatch was inside. Beside the watch, however, was a rolled up piece of paper. Although part of me knows what would be written I wondered anyway if my thoughts about it were right.

And I was right, in the paper were written instructions on how to get my friend out of prison. Ladies and Gentlemen (as Jonathan would put it), it's time for a time travelling prison break.

[Jonathan's point of view, after Griff's visit]

I didn't want to make him mad, that Griffith. I decided acting a little mysterious would simply be cooler than to tell him that I'm devising a plan that would encompass both present and future. It's still in the planning process, but If my theory is correct then I should be able to break out now. My theory is simply that if you plan in doing something, there's already a tendency of setting the future in motion. For example, If I planned on making a prison break strategy then the future would already have that prison break strategy. In other words, if my theory is correct, then thinking of doing a plan should set my plan in motion for the future. Anyway, about my plan:

Once they transfer me to a different jail, I will carve on the walls a secret message that only a friend of mine in the future can understand. Afterwards once I have the freedom to roam the country again I would bury the time machine along with a set of instructions on how to break me out. Of course, just those two ideas would take years to accomplish, but again if my theory is correct it should have already happened for Martin.

Now I need to test the theory, or the diligence of my friend. The first instruction was for him to go back in time, before this jail was built, and hopefully alter the plans to create a secret passage for me to go out of.

I looked around my cell for anything that could have been changed by Martin. It was evening, and this cells lighting isn't as bright as it should be, making it hard to get a good look at things. All right, I may be exaggerating, I was simply fatigued from all this elaborate planning, but I still managed to find something that feels out of place. It was a mirror. I mean sure a mirror probably isn't very out of place, but still, it seemed wrong. I went closer to check it out; making sure nobody was watching me from outside. The guards were busy playing cards with someone outside, I can hear their rowdy noise talking about whatever it is they're talking about that's got to do with cards. If my theory was correct, that should be part of the plan too.

I checked the mirror with my bare hands, nothing wrong with a whole body mirror I suppose, except for the fact that it was hiding a huge rectangular hole in the wall. Great, I assumed my plan was working...so far. Without a second thought I went through the passageway, which got me out and at the back of the police station I was staying in. The back area of the station was close to the woods, the same woods where I almost lost Shirley at my first day in 1936. I walked closer to the woods, quietly and vigilantly, hoping none of the guards checks my cell. When I was sure that I was in the clear, I ran straight into the woods, straight to a cabin where I fought for my love and my life days ago. I had hoped that the place would have been cleaned up, so I could use it as a hideout. If everything went smoothly, Martin and Griff would be meeting me there.

And after all that, If everything goes well, I'd go back to Shirley. I would let her decide whether we could stay together or not, after everything that happened. I would make her decide, if she would want to go with me.

Who knows, maybe I can take her back with me, to 2013.

Chapter 3: The Littlest Rebel

“Did she let him go, or did the four winds blow him away?”

I waited, well that was the plan, but I ended up falling asleep on the bench I sat on. Didn't know how long I was out, but it was already morning when I opened my eyes. Even in the woods the sun was shining brightly, clearly illuminating the form in front of me. Oh look, there was someone in front of me, my drowsiness disorienting me and preventing my brain from figuring out who are what is in front of me. All I could tell was that whatever that was; it was poking me on the cheek. After further consideration I realised it was a human finger, small and chubby enough to be that of a child's.

“Johnny?” She said, and I'm wide awake by this time, “Wake up, Johnny.”

“Um, Shirley?” It took me awhile, but it was her after all, poking me awake. But before I could mention any further words, I was hugged with tremendous and crushing cuddly-ness, the kind that's so tight you can hardly breathe but you don't want her to let go. We held each other for who knows how long, but I cherished it while I can, dreading that these may be the last few times I could hold her. I was afraid to let go, but that's what strong men do, sometimes they have to let go. “Hey, you can let go now, sweetheart. I can't breathe.”

“Oops, sorry about that.” She finally let go and I died a little inside, but she stood on the floor while I sat, and I got a good look at her for the first time this morning. Her hair is a little dishevelled; the bountiful curls she always had in her films looked less lively. Her eyes were so red; I assumed she never stopped crying during my absence. Unlike the usual, though, she was wearing denim overalls which had specks of mud all over. Considering I can pretty much see her bare chest and arms, I'm assuming she's not wearing anything else under the outfit. This was honestly more adorable than her other dresses. I made a mental note to make her wear more outfits like this if I could get her to run away with me. Lastly she was wearing working boots than seem a wee bit large for her feet.

“You're wearing muddy overalls and boots, were you digging or something?” I said, with my best grin, knowing the most likely correct answer to the question, “Or were you looking for me in the woods?”

“Well”, she said with a chuckle, “Griff told me where you were.”

“Ah.” Ah indeed, I don't remember making this a part of the plan. The plan was to meet Shirley somewhere a little public, not in this creepy place where she was almost raped. God knows I don't want her to remember that traumatic experience. This cabin was the perfect hideout, but the worst place to bring Shirley to. “Are you sure all right, though, going *here*?”

“...Yeah...” She trailed off, after all even an incredibly cheerful girl can only do so much. This place must hold a nightmarish grip in her heart. The specific place might be of no worth, but the event that happened has an effect. I must admit even I am a little disturbed in staying here, I feel like the more I stay in this place the more likely I am to have flashbacks of the event that almost got Shirley raped and almost got us killed. I held her hand to make up for making her remember, caressed her small fingers with mine, looked straight into her eyes, and kissed her lips gently; the kind of kiss that doesn’t say ‘I love you’, but the kind that says ‘everything will be fine’. I half expected her to slap me out of shock, or just get pissed for kissing her out of the blue, but all she did was smile and say, “Thank you.”

I smiled at her, as sweetly as I can, hoping to take this further but my plans were foiled thanks to the back door suddenly opening with a bang. I felt a tinge of fear, then an irrational irritation after seeing that it was only Martin - surprisingly drunk as fuck, considering he was stumbling around like a kung-fu drunken master.

“Woo! They don’t make beer this good anymore.” His only demeaning feature when drunk was his rude loudness, nothing else thankfully. And his annoying way of being a jerk, “Oh look, it’s the pedophile and his fuck buddy.”

“Hey!”

“Fuck buddy?!” I don’t know what made Shirley ask that, considering she can’t possibly know *that* word. We both looked at each other after realizing we just talked at the same time - something we’ve been doing quite often this week, and both laughed at the same time.

A few laughter and drunken swearing later, Martin explained to us that Griff was pretending to look for Shirley. He knows full well, that she’s here, but in order to follow my plan she has to go missing. The only thing that didn’t go as planned was Shirley apparently wrote a farewell letter saying that she wanted to run away with me. Combine that with my recent prison break I’m basically an outlaw. The authorities are looking for Shirley while hunting me down, fortunately Griff is keeping them away from our trail.

The next thing on my mind was how Griff decided to be on my team. Shirley answered that Griff came to her room the day after he talked to me, and she told him the whole truth. She told him all the things I told her, and somehow, that got him in the team. Miracles do happen.

Martin was already knocked out and Shirley was struggling out of her dirty clothes by time that Griff knocked on the cabin door. I panicked at first but Shirley told me that Griff used a secret knock she taught him. I went to get the door, but felt a shiver in my spine. As I held the door knob I tried to determine if Griff actually brought trouble, and what I should do in case he did. I pictured opening the door and seeing Griff with an angry mob, what should I do next? Only plan I managed to make is to run away with Shirley, or to at least tell her to run while I hold them back. I dreaded the result of that strategy, knowing that I wouldn't stand a chance. I held my breath...

...and opened the door.

It was just Griff. I let out a big sigh which he noticed, tapping me on the shoulder as he let himself in.

"Did you really think I would sell you out?" This time, it was his turn to grin at me, "I'm not as bad as you think I am, Gray."

"Oh look, you used my name, well last name but that's a start."

"I realized you were a lot more than I thought you were," He kicked Martin awake and sat on a wooden stool, "You guys are starting to get infamous, they already got Hoover on your case."

"The- the president?!" Martin was suddenly sober after hearing this news.

"No, idiot, the G-man," I punched him on the shoulder, like we always do, and said, "J. Edgar Hoover. FBI Director, and acquaintance of twelve year old Shirley Temple."

"Oooh..." Was all Shirley said. Might I mention the irrelevant fact that she's in her undies right now? If anyone's asking, she's wearing blue bloomers.

"Wow, really? That's all; no questions about you're future?" I ruffled her hair and she smiled at me, like a dog wagging its tail after you pat its head, "You're more adorable the more I get to know you."

Shirley and I found an extra clean room in the cabin, completely devoid of any furniture except for a mounted deer head. Having two windows, the room was well lit, for a room in a cabin in an isolated area in the woods.

“Are we going to do it yet?” She didn’t look at me while asking; she was looking around, fidgeting. I felt a pang of self-guilt, thinking that this little girl is head over heels for me, how could I take advantage of her. But as a child lover, how could I not?

“No,” I said, brushing my index finger on her cheek, trailing to her chin and lifting her face towards mine. Her eyes stopped moving and met with mine as I said, “I have a proposal for you.”

“We’re getting married?!” She covered her mouth as her eyes grew large with surprise.

“Well, not exactly, but I was hoping you could go back with me,” I looked straight at her, checking for what expression will her face show to react; the only reaction I got, though, was a smile.

“I’d love to...” She said, and then looked down and up at me again, “We can always go back here can’t we?”

Now here’s a dilemma, I have no idea if we could still travel back again or what would happen if we do. In other words, unsure but we probably won’t be able to go back. Next problem is that Shirley might not want to go with me if there’s even a chance that it would be permanent, and she won’t be able to go back to her family. So the real question is: should I tell her the truth that going back is uncertain with a low chance? I decided to do what any human being would do.

“Of course we can,” I lied straight to her face, keeping secrets is one thing, but it hurts to lie to someone you love. “I’m a bona fide time traveller, sweetheart.”

She hugged me again, like it was a trend, and for once in my life I hesitated to hug her back. Suddenly I don’t feel worthy of her love. It took a lot of self-convincing to wrap my arms around her, telling myself that I did what I must. Our hug was broken as we heard the footsteps of people and chatter of voices getting nearer. We ran towards the cabin’s back door and almost collided with Griff and Martin. We paused for a short while trying to figure out what to do next; afraid to waste time, I spoke up.

“Guys...RUN!!!”

Chapter 4: Temple Run 2

“Run baby run, don’t ever look back, they’ll tear us apart if you give them the chance...”

We could’ve hidden in the cabin, but something tells me my friends and I are better off running away than hiding. Martin said that we couldn’t just simply use the time machine to go back to 2013. The time machine was designed for only one person, so Martin needs a place to set up a signal booster that will allow the machine to transport a group of people. So now we have two problems to solve. The first one being that we’re running from people who may or may not notice and go after us, the second being to find and go to a place where Martin can set up a group time travel machine.

We ran as quickly yet as quietly as we can, while Griff thinks aloud as to the places that we can use. Abandoned buildings, empty playgrounds, unpopulated areas, anything as long as it’s big and can be used without interruption.

“Well?” Martin was whispering, which is good I think, since we should be stealthy right now.

“There’s a house currently under construction near us, we may be able to use that.” Griff pointed towards the horizon to show us where to go. He led the way and we followed, me carrying Shirley while Martin carried some stuff he needed. Our feet carried us to where we wanted to go, but my mind was somewhere else. I was worried that things may not go according to plan. I had prepared counterstrategies for every contingency I could think of, but I feel as if this may be that part of the movie where Murphy’s Law is the strongest. (Murphy’s Law being the idea that if something will go wrong, it will)

In stories like these, it usually does.

Everything went well so far. We got to the construction site without running into any trouble and it just happened to be the workers’ break time. We all let a sigh of relief as we saw the area was completely empty. We surveyed the area for any possible problems but everything is empty, and all is well as far as I’m concerned. Martin set his materials up, and went around the place to look for salvageable stuff. I set

Shirley down the closest comfortable place I could find and knelt beside her. I smiled as I noticed her coveralls were slightly loose causing one of the straps to fall beside her arm, making her adorable and sexy at the same time. I held her hand again and decided to brace for time travel.

“You ready for this sweetheart?”, I said, “Things are quite different from where I came from.”

“I guess we’ll find out, huh?” She said with a giggle, the kind that could only be hers.

I kissed her again and went to talk to Griff, he still hasn’t explained why he’s helping us so willingly now. I couldn’t think of any possible way a child can simply encourage a stubborn adult to believe in her. But then again this is Shirley we’re talking about; maybe the matchmaking skills she portrays in her movies aren’t so fake after all. I nodded at Griff and he nodded back, his arms crossed and his face seemingly blank.

“You coming?”, I said, standing next to him like I did before. He looks at me, then looks away chuckling and shaking his head.

“Of course I am, I’m her bodyguard remember?”, He said, “I’m not doing that just ‘cause I’m being paid for it, it’s like an obligation now. Even if my contract is already expired in the future.”

“By the way,” I asked, subtly checking his face to see if he will answer truthfully, “Why did you really help us out? I mean it’s not like you just upped and decided to trust me and help me out.”

“This isn’t for you”, he replied and glanced at Shirley, “It’s for her. When she told me you came all the way from the future to find her, and then almost got yourself killed saving her from a molester. I just know you’re the right man to take care of her. I still don’t trust you, but I believe in you.”

I couldn’t say anything to that, I must say that I always try to be emotionally distant when dealing with people, but I felt a tear streak along my cheek, “Awesome”, I said, but he wasn’t done yet.

“That’s why I’m coming along; to make sure I made the right choice of letting her go with you. Her life here may be perfect for a child, but I don’t think it’s perfect for her. Maybe you’re just the kind of person she needs right now.”

He tipped his hat to me and went inside the room where Martin was tinkering around. Shirley was in an empty area in the house playing with some left over carpenter tools. I told her to leave the items alone and beckoned her to Martin’s room. Hopefully the man has already finished, because either the workers will come or the people will find this place a likely hideout.

“Everything’s good to go” , Martin said , “We should be able to travel back to 2013 as a group.”

“How certain is the chance of us getting through?” , I had to ask, mainly because I never liked diving into something without a foresight, “Alive and complete of course?”

“Well”, Martin eyed each of us, as if waiting to ask for consent, “This is the first time it’s to be done”

“WHAT?!” Griff, Shirley and I all shouted in sync. If this was a sitcom, I think I would be hearing laugh tracks by now.

Before we could even argue regarding the survival rate of four crazy people, the crowd that seems to be following our trail started to sound close by. We decided to just leave it all to faith, as we told Martin to give it a go. As the machine starts to hum, stray bolts of electricity started to generate around us, as if we were walking tesla coils. A force-field-like sphere was growing around the group, obliterating the parts of the room that it touches. With its blue-ish hue, the force field continued to grow, until it was the size of the room itself. And then, in an instant, the sphere imploded and I thought we were going to die. Apparently everyone else thought that too at the moment, as we all screamed together when our surrounding started to flash blue and it felt like we would explode. A loud sound that I can only compare to an earthquake was coming from all around us, but we could not see anything except for this blue vortex-like light. Afterwards, the ground shook and it felt like we were in a little ball being thrown around. All of that happened in a matter of seconds as the sphere imploded on us, and before we knew it, we were thrown around and away from one another in this vortex. The only thing on my mind was that this might be the eye of a storm looked like.

“Johnny!!!” Shirley was screaming, and I saw her inches from me holding out her hand and spinning around like she was being carried away by a twister.

“Shirley!” I shouted and stretched my hand as far as I could. For a moment it felt like we were so far from each other, and if our hands don’t reach, we may be separated forever. Thankfully our hands met, and our open palms transformed into vice-grips as soon as possible, holding one another like we will never let go. “Hold on!!!”

I couldn’t find Martin or Griff in the vortex, and I feared the worst for them. I can’t believe I would lose my old best friend and my new one at the same time. But I decided that the only important thing right now was that Shirley and I were together. I pulled her close and held her in my arms; Its funny, I’ve held her so many times but this time felt different. This hug felt like the kind of hug a person gives to prove that he loves someone. This hug felt like a confession, like an oath. I’ve confessed to her before, out of a spur of the moment, but I want to do it right this time.

“Shirley!” I said, louder than necessary because of the vortex, “I love you, and I’ll never let you go!”

“I love you too!” Shirley shouted back, our arms tightening around each other, “I dunno what would’ve happened to me if you didn’t arrive, but this is better than any other future in store for me!”

We held each other, and as the light flashed brighter and seemed to explode, our lips met and nothing else in the universe mattered anymore.

Chapter 5: Crazy Little Thing Called Luck

“It was like a time-bomb set in emotion, we knew that we were destined to explode...”

I can still feel Shirley wrapped under my arms, she was shivering, or was that me? I opened my eyes, and was glad to see that we were alive, and back in the city. I checked the cars, and when I saw a passing Chevrolet Camaro I assumed that we should be back in my time. I told Shirley that we were fine and she opened her eyes, looked around with a wondrous smile on her face and hugged me tighter. At first I thought she didn't want to be here, so I asked her what the problem was.

“Nothing, I’m just glad we’re safe,” She said, while rubbing my cheek with her palm (God knows why she does that), “But I wonder where Griff or Martin is...”

Indeed, where were those two? If we survived, chances are they did too. I stood up, carrying Shirley in my arms, and started to look for them. I managed to look at the sidewalk we landed on before leaving, and it almost looks like the landing point of a meteor, or like the time travel sphere in the Terminator movies, leaving a steaming-molten crater and all that.

I decided to take a good look around, ‘cause I expected to end up in the park where we tested out the time machine/wristwatch. But we were in the middle of a city, the kind that reminds you of New York even if you’ve never been there yet and only saw it through movies. But I’m pretty sure I was in Manila when I time-travelled, could we have been thrown out of coordinates?

“Look Johnny, it’s the Statue of Liberty!” Shirley pointed out, and I checked, yup we’re in New York.

I decided to find a newspaper stand or something to check the date on the tabloids. But before I could start walking something hit the side of head. I looked down to see what hit me: it was a rolled up tabloid. I checked the general direction where the weapon came from and almost threw the tabloid back to its owner.

“Hey!”

“You guys are late.” It was Martin and Griff, merrily drinking coffee in a Starbucks (they were sitting in the outer areas). We went to them and I managed to get my revenge on Martin with the tabloid.

“You adjusted pretty fast,” I said to Griff, noting his latte by the table.

“Coffee is still coffee no matter how many years pass,” he replied.

“We checked the tabloids, and we’re in the right time,” Martin said, after sipping from his venti, “May 2013, but we’re in the wrong place, New York.”

“Where did you want to be anyway?” Shirley asked after trying to sip some of Griff’s latte, the look on her face after she tasted it was so adorable. (Shirley: Now I know why kids shouldn’t drink coffee :3)

“Manila, Philippines,” I said, “We’re miles away from home.”

“Funny,” Griff said, while Shirley sipped from Martin’s drink, “You don’t look Asian.”

“That’s cause both my parents were Fil-Ams,” I said, but before I could explain what I just said an earthquake shook the ground we were standing on. It wasn’t a high magnitude, but it was enough to spill the drinks and put people on panic mode. People started going outside and checking if they were missing someone or whatever. My friends were all safe, thank God, but I don’t think the ordeal was done yet. “Look in the sky, guys,” I said with my finger pointing up, “That looks like an oncoming storm...”

There was a large dark cloud covering the sun above us. You could hear thunder and see lightning bolts going to and fro the cloud. The strange part is that when I looked over the Statue of Liberty, it was sunny. It almost looked like the cloud was only targeting this part of the city, the part we’re in.

“Balls!” Martin exclaimed, then took out his laptop(which I never saw him bring along), and started typing madly. When he was done, he looked at us, and said, “We’re the reason for that cloud.”

“What?”

“What?!”

“We made that cloud?” Griff, me and Shirley all replied.

“I made some calculations, in theory time paradoxes could rip space and time apart,” He looked up, “Which could be what is happening now.” He kept looking at the cloud, then raised his eyebrow, “It could be because we brought two people from the past, especially Shirley. Somewhere in New York the old Shirley Temple could be hanging around, and now the young one is also here.” He typed some more in his laptop, all of us just staring and waiting for another theory, when he looked at us and said, “Or perhaps the existence of four time travellers together is just too much.”

“All right, so we have a problem,” I said, and did what I do best, “But what we really need is a solution. How do we fix this?”

“This is all in theory,” Martin said, shaking his head, “only solution I can think of is if we feed the storm a paradox so strong it collapses in on itself.”

“What’s a paradox?” Shirley asked, while Griff nodded as if also asking.

“A paradox is something that defies the rule of space and time,” I replied, relishing in the fact that I look like a super genius right now, “Like a grandson going back in time to be his own grandfather, or better yet, what if I went back in time and killed my grandfather, that way my dad and I will never be born, but If I was never born, then who would kill my grandfather?”

“Ow, I think my brain just melted,” Shirley said with her hands on her head, reminding me of a Psyduck (yeah that’s a Pokémon reference, bitches)

“Where can we get a paradox big enough to stop this storm?” Griff said, though I can see in his eyes he knows that Shirley is one, but doesn’t want the conversation to go there.

“We need someone or something that should and shouldn’t exist right now,” Martin said, “But we don’t have any, don’t we?” He looked at me, and I knew what that meant: Shirley. I shook my head ‘no’, and tried to think of another way.

“Even if we did have a big paradox in our hands, how would we feed it to the storm?” I asked, trying to cover every possible loophole that we may have to face. Martin replied with a point of his finger to the Empire State Building, which had its tip hidden in dark clouds. “Damn, that’s like, very apocalyptic, man.”

“It is, if we don’t stop this storm, it could turn into a supermassive black hole,” Martin waited for our reaction, I knew what that meant but the other two didn’t, “And destroy Earth!”

“Shit!”

“Oh no!” Griff and Shirley looked up at the storm. It’s getting lower, with a twister-like eye starting to eat up the top of the Empire State Building. The area we’re in is getting darker by the minute, like an ominous event slowly unfolding. I started walking towards the tall building, an idea forming in my mind.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Martin grabbed my shoulder and tried to stop me, Griff and Shirley followed suite. “We don’t have any way of stopping that thing!”

“Yes we do,” I turned to them, as serious as I could be right now. I’m scared to hell, but I can’t let that show on my face. I was always capable of putting on a good poker face in front of people; probably ‘cause I don’t trust them with my feelings, but I don’t think I could hide this fear, not from Shirley, “The thing wants a big paradox to eat...”

Griff moved in front of Shirley, thinking that I was suggesting using her to stop the storm. I looked at him as if saying, ‘Don’t you know who I am? Why would I sacrifice the one I love?’

“...it can have me!” Everyone was obviously shocked by my statement. Before they could even speak, I turned and started making my way to the building again, building up speed and breaking into a jog. They followed and Martin asked me what the hell I was talking about.

“I’m a larger paradox than Shirley,” I said, not making an effort to stop moving, “I went back in time and changed a lot of events, I spent my life in a prison to make you go back in time and help me escape. I escaped and therefore never spent my life in prison, so how could I ask for your help in escaping?”

Martin was dumbfounded, even though we were both technical geniuses, my forte has always been people while his was science. The only thing he replied with was, “How does that make you any bigger of a paradox?”

“I’m not done yet,” I handed him the newspaper, “Check the date, we landed a day before you gave me the time machine.” After I said these words Martin’s eyes lit up, the only thing missing was a light bulb above his head.

“So now there’s two of you in the universe. And even better, this storm will set off a chain reaction that will most likely prevent you from time travelling!” He shouted a hurrah of triumph, even though these were all in theory. “Now you should and shouldn’t be here, and so is that storm! If you even get close, that thing will surely disappear to resolve the paradoxes!”

The best part was that I understood what he was talking about thanks to watching a shitload of Doctor Who. Basically he was saying that all will be well, considering this works. He explained the situation to Griff, while I explained it to Shirley, who was running with me while holding my hand.

"Are you sure it will work?" She said, and her grip tightened, "Because I don't want you to die because of me."

"Hey," I patted her head with my free hand, slowing down a bit, "I don't plan to die for anything, and I want to live for you."

She smiled at me, but her eyes tell me she's not convinced. It seems like she knows what I plan to do. After all, she's seen me rush into a life-and-death situation for her sake before, she must feel like she's about to see me do it again. And she may be correct, my plan is to get as close to the eye of the storm, hoping that my paradox is large enough to make it collapse on itself, if not, then I'll jump in it and hope that does the trick. Of course, the only problem with my backup plan is the fact that I may die. Don't ask me why I'm risking this much for the world, because my answer will be this: I'm not doing this for the world, or its people, this one's for Shirley and no one else. I'm not a hero, never was, this is just an inevitable sacrifice for a selfish motive.

We went inside the building, all four of us, much to my pleading for Shirley and Griff to stay outside for it's too dangerous for them to go with me. It's funny how I started this stupid adventure alone, and now I'm getting ready to finish it with a group. I always preferred doing things on my own, makes me more comfortable to have to rely on no one but me; and yet I'm thankful to God for the ones beside me right now, for I don't think I could do this alone.

"Long way up, let's hope the elevator works," As I said that, the elevator doors opened with a ding, "Cool, let's hope the power doesn't go out while we're in."

That's exactly what happened though; just when we were one floor away from the top, the lights went out, Shirley and Martin screamed, Griff and I pried the doors open and we went to the top floor on foot. Just when we were so close to the door for the rooftop, I started feeling weak. I stumbled to one knee and propped a hand on the wall for support. I could feel cold sweat running through my skin. Something's not right, I thought, perhaps the storm won't let me near it?

"Johnny," Shirley said, pointing at me with the most worried expression I've seen her wear, "You're fading away!"

I looked at my hands, and to my disturbing shock I see that I am indeed fading. My hand, as well as my other body parts, looked like an apparition bleeding through the void of reality. I was literally transparent, and slowly disappearing. My composure was lost and I screamed, "DAMMIT!" ; as weak as I am, I managed to get up and try to punch the wall, I succeeded.

"I'm still tangible; there must be something we can do." I managed to straighten my face again. But before I even said anything else, I noticed my body was going back to normal, "Well that was easy."

"No, it wasn't," Martin said out of the blue, face as straight as possible, "The storm was resolving your paradox, you were disappearing so that the other you will continue existing. It was separating your existence from your other, past, self."

"Then how come I didn't disappear?"

"Causality loop, I had to make sure you would travel back in time to make all of this happen," He looked at me, "To make the present *YOU* happen. Why do you think I suddenly told you about the time machine in the first place? Because I called myself to do so, and I'm ashamed to not have realized it until now."

"Damn. That's some heavy shit," Was all I could say. I was already by the door and ready to send this storm back to wherever it came from.

"Time and space must have already considered you an anomaly, Jonathan," Martin said, holding the door closed, "If you go out there, in theory, your whole existence will be considered a paradox, an anomaly, an error."

"I have to stop this storm..."

"If you even try to go any nearer than you are," Martin looked straight at me, fear written all over his face, "The storm will cease to exist, but so will you. Your whole existence - past, present, future will be erased!"

"How will erasing me make the storm stop?" I was afraid, and that was okay. To die was one thing, to never live in the first place was another horror entirely. "I ca-can't just blink out of e-existence, r-right?"

"Think of it like a program that has too many errors, viruses. The program would try to resolve the error, but there's way too many, it can only pinpoint a root source - a main problem. It's going to crash or restart, but it will disappear and it will take that source virus with it."

"But that won't fix the other viruses," was all I could say.

"No, but the main problem is gone, the others will be deemed irrelevant regardless of them being there." He leaned on the door to make sure I don't open it, "You will be erased, so that the storm will leave everyone else alone. I can't allow that to happen."

I looked down, knowing that there was no other way. I thought destiny was on my side, helping me since the beginning of my journey to be with my love. I survived through most of my ordeals with a mixture of wisdom and luck. Who knew that destiny would take it all away from me in the end?

"Johnny, you don't have to this." Shirley was starting to cry.

"Jonathan, don't be a hero, it doesn't suite you." Griff was looking out the window, seemingly distant.

"We should just all go out there together," Martin said, "That way everyone will be safe, and none of us would remember what happened. We won't miss each other, and nobody will miss us because we would never have existed in the first place."

None of us had an argument for that. I called Martin in one corner to strategize.

"I have a plan," I whispered to him, and looked at everyone else, "Let's regroup downstairs."

Griff held Shirley's hands and started down, Martin following. It was too late for him to realize what my plan was. Before he could turn back to me, I opened the door, went outside, closed and locked the door from the outside. I could hear them pounding on the metallic object separating me from those I live for. I could hear Shirley screaming on the other side.

"Johnny, NO! Please, please, please don't this..." She was crying, and so was I. I made sure they couldn't open the door.

"Shirley," I said through the steel plate, knowing she could hear me, "I love you, and I'm doing this for you."

The eye of the storm must've noticed my presence and started moving to where I was standing. It felt like a hurricane was getting ready to eat me.

"John...ny..." Shirley was sobbing hysterically, it reminded of a scene from her Little Princess movie, "I love you but... please...don't..."

"Hey! Have I ever told you that I'm the luckiest man alive?" I shouted back as I inched closer to the storm. "I got to travel back in time to meet Shirley Temple, I gave her the best cunnilingus she could ever have, I brought her to the future, and now I would save the world for her."

I dunno why, but I wasn't scared anymore. I always feared the unknown, but this time, even if I have no idea what happens to me next, I'm not afraid.

As the sound of Shirley's scream, and Martin and Griff's pounding started to fade out, I just smiled and prayed. I could feel the storm absorbing my existence, I dunno how I could but I do. But before this was all over, I still had one more thing to say to Shirley.

"Shirley!", I shouted back to her, cringing at the slow weakening of my voice, "Just wait, I will find you again! Time couldn't stop me, and I'm telling you right now, nothing will!"

And then everything was gone, or was it me who was gone?

I don't know where I was, it felt so cold, but it didn't bother me. I felt like I was flying around the universe in a million particles, my consciousness slowly fading away. I knew deep inside though, that once I go to sleep I will never wake up, my existence and memories will be gone. I did not want to go to sleep, but I was awfully tired.

I must be a ghost, I thought, for I could hear Shirley. In fact I could see a fleeting image of her in the roof top, skies are clear all was well and she was looking for something. What was she looking for? She could not remember, but she kept looking anyway; tears with unknown reason streaming from her eyes, she looked. Did she find what she was looking for, I wonder?

It's time to rest, I thought, when I hear a last fading sentence from the little girl looking for something in the roof. The little girl with no memory of who she was, of why she was here, and what was she looking for. That little girl still had something to say:

"Find me again; I'm waiting for you..." She looked up, and for a while I thought she could see me, "...my Time Bomb..."

The words pierced my heart, and no matter how tired I was I didn't want to fall asleep. Wherever I am, even though it feels like I'm in space, in a million pieces, I don't want to keep her waiting. But I couldn't stop myself, like a weary child struggling to keep her eyes open I couldn't stay awake. 'Time Bomb' kept on lingering in my head, like a clue to an unsolvable mystery, but there was nothing else I could do...

Except to be a Time Bomb, I thought, and what do time bombs do?

Explode.