

The Greatest Dream

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Rest in peace, my poor short story. Your prior existence, though painfully brief, will remain with me forever.

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The Greatest Dream

He could still remember the day his dream began--January 4th, 1958.

That date had been scribbled on a piece of paper, wadded up and torn. A man whom he'd never seen before in his life--and had never seen since that day--had given this paper to him, with a promise that his greatest dream in the world would be granted if he visited the people on it.

There were, of course, some requirements. He had to visit every single person--on the exact date and time listed--and if he skipped even one, or missed a day, the dream wouldn't come true. It hadn't made sense at the time; but there was something trustworthy about the man, so he'd believed every word of it.

And now, his dream was finally coming true.

He smiled, thinking of dreams. In the back of his mind, the voice of his brother rang as clear as if he had heard it just the day before. That voice was all that had kept him going these past twenty-three years.

"I'm coming, Jordan," he whispered softly to himself.

The machine jolted to life.

It had taken him many years to construct this; he hadn't realized exactly what it was until halfway through the list, when someone mentioned their theories on the concept of time--concepts necessary for the construction of such a machine. Those theories would never have been developed had it not been for the woman he'd visited the week before--a young high school student who wrote a research paper that sparked the idea. She never would've written that paper had her father not come home that night--and he never would've come home that night had he really been involved in that car accident--

It had been a very long twenty-three years.

There was a sound of metal hitting concrete; the impact sent shockwaves up his body.

Somewhere, there was a pop and a hiss; the door unlatched and fell open.

He stepped out of the machine, and it disintegrated--though he had been expecting that--and he peered out into the night.

But there was no sign of him.

He grew confused--he was supposed to be here right now. Had he not entered the correct date into the machine? He'd done everything else that the list had told him to--and as he pulled it from his pocket and re-read the numbers listed down at the bottom, his eyebrows furrowed in frustration. He hadn't made any mistakes. Then why?

A gunshot rang clear through the midnight hour, and his blood froze over. A chill ran down his spine and his hand closed around the list as he went running off in the direction of the sound.

He saw it before he stopped running. His breath caught in his throat--it couldn't be--

But there before him, though he had never expected to see it again, was his brother, dead, shot in the chest by

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a drive-by.

He choked on a sob and fell behind the building, burying his face in his hands. He was too late. For the second time in his life, he was too late.

“Jordan?...Jordan!”

A voice that was startlingly familiar knocked him out of his thoughts as a young boy ran in, falling to his knees.

“It can’t be...” the man whispered.

“Jordan! What’s wrong? Why are you...what?...”

He drew his hands up from where he had placed them on his brother’s chest and saw the blood shining in the moonlight. His eyes widened, and his hands began shaking.

“No...”

The words echoed in the man’s mind.

“No!...”

“Nicholas,” the man said before he could stop himself. “Nicholas...he’s gone.”

The boy shook his head; but as he looked back down at the blood, and at his brother, large tears began to spill down his face. “No!” he cried, “Not Jordan...no!”

He wished to console him, to comfort him; but the man could do nothing he watched his own memories play out before him. He wished the time machine hadn’t disintegrated, that he could go anywhere in time again...anywhere but here. All he had ever thought of was to save his brother, but now...

“...stupid...time machine,” the boy muttered.

The man’s eyes narrowed, and his thoughts refocused. “What?”

Nicholas sniffed, wiping his nose on the back of his sleeve. “My brother, Jordan,” he said, looking up at him. “Do you want to know what the last thing he said to me was?”

The words resounded clearly in the man’s mind before the boy even said them.

“He wanted to build a time machine. Isn’t that so silly?” A half-smile slipped on his face.

“We all told him that he couldn’t do it. I mean, a time machine?” He paused as a shadow clouded his eyes. “You know, my brother...was the most important person in the world to me.”

“I know,” the man said quietly.

“I would’ve done anything for him, if I could’ve. Even if it was impossible.” He laughed.

“Even if it was building a...stupid...time machine.”

And then a curious expression lit the man’s face. He looked first at the sky, and then at the boy; and there

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was a mysterious light in his eyes.

“What are you laughing at, mister?”

The man said nothing, shaking his head with a smile; and he held his hand out to the boy. Slowly his fingers loosened their grip to reveal a crumpled piece of paper, water-stained and torn; and with mixed amusement, he wondered just how old that paper truly was.

“What is this?” the boy asked as he picked it up and examined it.

The man considered this for a moment. “The impossible,” he finally answered.

And, without even waiting for the boy to read the paper, he turned and walking away. He disappeared into the night, going nowhere in particular; but though the boy had wished to many years later, he never saw the man again.

As Nicholas carefully unfolded the paper, peering at the words inside, he read:

January 4th, 1958.

And, in a writing he could recognize but couldn't seem to place:

The day your dreams begin.

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