

Chapter 1: A Big Bang Theory

Photographs taken, like memories of you, they disappear...

An explosion.

One of the underlying theories in the birth of the universe is the theory about the Big Bang.

Scientists say that a huge explosion caused all matter to form. Galaxies, universes, and planets were all created from this chaos. Follow a group of scientists and science experts discover the truth about the birth of our world, on Discover--

--BZZT.

I turned off the telly, annoyed at the numerous advertisements their showing before I can even watch the show I was waiting for. I lost all interest in watching whatsoever, and decided to walk around the apartment, hoping for something interesting to show up. Not that it's boring in here, mind you; Uncle Martin's apartment was as good as it gets for a guy who sold a billion dollar idea to the science community. Now that I think about it, I loosely use the term 'apartment', when it was more like a condominium, really.

I walk around the place, noticing the bookshelves filled with science books and reading material for a person with a high IQ. I tried to read one of those books once, they made my head hurt. I stayed away from the bookshelf and headed towards my room. Although I and Uncle Martin sleep in the same bedroom, our beds were separated and there was a divider splitting the room up. I asked him once if I can sleep with him, but he shrugged saying that "It's not his style", whatever that means. I looked over at his bed, quite regular for a man with a lot of money and still working, and saw a shelf full of DVDs. Most of them were of a sci-fi tv show called "Doctor Who", and even though I'm bored, I've already watched all of the collections in Uncle Martin's shelf. He doesn't mind me using them, he keeps saying that the DVDs were not his but were given to him by a friend who passed away. I asked him who his friend was a few days ago, but he only replied y saying I wouldn't know of him.

I pulled back the curtain dividing our beds, and saw my toys all scattered on my blanket. I picked them up and kept them in my little storage box - a sturdy cardboard box with a Captain America design I bought from Toys R' Us. Uncle Martin always asked me why I loved the character so much, I never could answer him properly. I guess I'm just emphatic with Captain America having to wake up in a time he's not used to, the feeling of being in the wrong time; I don't know why I feel that way, though, I just do.

I looked inside the box for anything to play with, there was a 3DS and a WiiU, but I didn't feel like playing with them. Gadgets were not my favorite kind of toy; I liked sticking to simple dolls and action figures. I looked deeper, and became puzzled after seeing a strange stuff toy I don't remember buying.

It was red dynamite, with a clock strapped on it. What do they call these things again?

A Time Bomb?

I figured Uncle Martin must've bought the time bomb toy, and decided to go on a food adventure in our kitchen instead. As I was passing by my open laptop, I noticed that an email has been sent for me. I read if it was really for me, or if it was just spam.

It was mailed only to me, no CCs; just my name: Shirley Jane T. Newman

I opened it, it was from Martin T. Newman. Don't get the wrong idea, we're not related by blood at all. The surname was a formality, according to him, to make my adoption appropriate. He always told me about how I was kidnapped a long time ago, taken away from my parents; I was saved by Uncle Martin's friend, but because he passed away and my parents were nowhere to be found, Uncle Martin had to adopt me.

"Will be late home from work tonight", the email said, "Just get a pizza delivered or something. Remember to let the hotel's bellboy bring it up for you; don't let the pizza man do it. Just tell them to charge it on my account."

Typical Uncle Martin, always working late in his office. After selling his 'billion dollar idea' he was quite wealthy, but he never had time to spend all his money so he lets me use it instead. He became an executive in the company he's working at - Dynamic Sciences Consolidated, but he always had things to do and meetings to attend. Basically, I'm here to spend his money while he earns it. Can't say I don't like it, frankly I don't remember having money problems so I guess I'm more used to this life.

I replied with an "OK, will do.", and checked the fridge for anything to eat. It was full with milk and fruits, a bunch of energy drinks, and the occasional beer in cans. Nothing to see here, I thought, and went for the phone.

I dialed my favorite pizza place and asked for their best pizza package (in case uncle would want some when he gets home), and went downstairs to notify our receptionist (who also happens to be our chief of security and occasional bellhop) about the oncoming pizza delivery. There was no one in the lounge so I assumed he's probably in the security room checking the CCTVs or whatever. I knocked before entering the security room (last time I went in without knocking an alarm went off), and he opened the door for me.

"Hello, G." I said, giving him my warmest smile. I always called him G, because his surname sounded *intimidating* (big word, I meant scary). I mean John Griff doesn't sound friendly at all, so I baptized him with the nickname 'G'.

"Hello, Shirley. What's up?" He said, and I snickered. I always found that phrase funny, like I've heard that joke a looong time ago and it still hasn't worn off.

"Just wanted to say," I replied, "Pizza's on its way." I giggled with the accidental rhyming, and he told me he'd take care of it, so I went back up. Inside the elevator I had to tiptoe to press the button for the 6th floor. It's easier going down 'cause the ground floor button is within reach, I noted. My short stubby legs weren't exactly meant for helping me reach stuff. I went back up to our room, fixing my dress after it almost got caught by the elevator doors. I looked at the floral blue and pink print on my dress, swishing the dress with both hands and twirling around because I'm simply bored. An idea formed in my head as I went to the mirror to check how pretty I would look with the dress swishing around my legs. I looked at myself, smiling in front of the mirror. My blonde, curly hair was messed up after running around the condo, my face was somewhat dirty too, I figured; I went to the bathroom to clean myself up.

The bathroom was as luxurious as it gets, for your average condominium. I took all my clothes off and had the quickest shower an 8 year old could have. After 5 minutes of drying my hair with a hair dryer (duh?), I realized I had forgotten my bathrobe and ran out of the bathroom to get it. Once I got to my room for the robe I noticed how I looked at the mirror, which happens to be a full body kind of mirror. I saw myself, neither fat nor thin, completely naked running around the house. It was either the boredom or something was wrong with me, I thought, for I was starting to entertain the idea of staying naked while Uncle Martin was out. It was just me at home anyway, why be embarrassed, right? Plus, the idea of me exposing myself like a shameless nudist was making my stomach feel funny. Since I've nothing better to do, I thought, why not?

I went to the mirror and flaunted myself; I'm a kid so I didn't worry about the lack of breasts or "hair". I've never been so confident about my body like this before, I thought. I decided to up the ante and went for the glass window in the living room. I just stood there and checked if anyone can see me, I wonder what they would think about a naked little girl displaying herself in the 6th floor window of an apartment? The thought made my heart skip a beat and my stomach produced butterflies, without knowing it I felt my pussy being touched by something. Oh, wait, that's my hand. I didn't know how, but I knew I was unconsciously playing with myself, and I liked it. I just stood by the large glass wall that was a window and kept rubbing my fingers around my lips, my right hand in charge of the lips on my mouth, while my left... well go figure. The idea of someone seeing me just made me my fingers and my hands go faster; I must be really bored, I thought, to be doing something like this. If only I knew about this earlier, I might not have done anything else. I kept rubbing myself, my fingers doing their dirty work without having to let me think, my body was moving on its own.

I could feel myself getting ready...for something. I don't know what, but I can feel it coming, like pee after drinking lots of water. It felt like I was about to explode. I could feel it building up, and my mouth automatically made a noise as I was about to go boom; I didn't bother to hear it, but it sounded like the combination of a moan and a scream.

"MmMmMhmHmh!" I heard myself like I was in a 3rd person point of view and as I exploded I felt my vagina leak with something that felt like pee, but not pee. My legs felt like jello and I plopped down on my knees, my left hand still shoved in between my legs. My eyes were only half-closed, and it felt like something else exploded as I did. The ground shook for a while, and the lights went dark for a few seconds then came back on.

Wait a minute, that can't be right. No matter how good it felt, I don't think it could make me see or hear things. The phone was ringing and I have never wanted to stay still as much as I do now, but I went up to answer it anyway, dreading yet loving the sticky feeling between my legs.

"He-Hello?" ,I said weakly.

"One of our generators exploded, just wanted to know if anything bad happened there?", It was G.

"I'm f-fine, you can go check me out--I mean check on me if you want..." I smiled to myself thinking I must be a very naughty girl, wanting G to see me like this. I guess I got tired of being such a nice, adorable, goody two-shoes all the time.

"You sound shaken, but if you say you're fine I'll have to make you wait a tick," He said, and I frowned, "Just have to check the other generators for problems, and then I'll come on up, 'kay?" I couldn't wait for him to come up and see me like this, I thought, and a few seconds later I slapped myself for that. What the hell was I thinking, being all flirty and sexy and naughty?

After a while, the bell rang and I answered the door for G. I didn't bother to dress, partially because I started to like going nude and because I wanted to play a sexy prank on G, just to see how he will react.

I opened the door with the sexiest smile I could think of on my face, but it disappeared when I saw that it wasn't G waiting at the other side.

"Hello, Ms. Newman" , the stranger said, I wearing a smile that was obviously fake along with his all black suit and red tie. I saw a shift in the smile in his face when he saw what I was wearing, and pushed the half-open door to let his self in. Panic started to build up when he closed and locked the door behind him, trapping us together, but curiosity conquered my mind.

"Who are you and what do you want from me?" I said, trying to act tough even though I knew he could do anything he wanted and I wouldn't stand a chance.

"Ms. Newman, or should I say Temple," I was confused by what he said, but he wasn't finished yet, "I need to speak to your guardian, Martin Newman, or better yet, your boyfriend..."

“Huh?” I don’t have a boyfriend, I thought, but all of a sudden it felt like I did. It felt like I had a memory of having a boyfriend, images of a man I’ve never met are roaming around my head. I needed to know who this man was, or how could I forget him. I needed to remember, because suddenly I knew that I forgot. I looked at this man in front of me, and listened if he would tell me the name I needed to hear.

“Jonathan Gray.”

Chapter 2: A Tale Of Two Timelines

I'll stop the whole world from turning into a monster, and eating us alive...

“I want what they have.” The stranger said, I focused on his face despite my fear, just in case I survive, I thought. He was completely bald, and there were no signs of hair on his round muscular head. No eyebrows, no side burns, just a small soul patch above his lips. Basically, he was ugly as crap, he’s obviously a psycho targeting naked little girls, I thought. After all, couldn’t he have seen me when I displayed myself on the window?

“Please,” I begged while I inched away, scanning the room for anything I can use to fight, “Explain...”

“You don’t remember?” , what the heck was he talking about, I thought, “I saw the events from a month ago, the Empire State Building incident? Everyone else forgot, but I remember.” He sat down in the sofa and pulled out a roll of duct tape, then he set it on the table. “You do enough research and you’ll find evidence. Evidence of a man who wasn’t there, and his accomplices.”

He stood up, and looked around the room; I tried to inch closer to the phone to dial the emergency alarm sequence.

“Even if people and events were erased from existence, there will always be fragments of evidence. And all evidence points to two people: Martin Newman and Jonathan Gray. A bunch of seemingly nobodies from a 3rd world country, who would’ve thought, huh? Let me show you something.”

He plugged something in the tv and it showed his desktop, he played a video of a news I’ve seen before.

The unknown vigilante known as The Grief has struck again, this time attacking another member of a chain of company’s working on a secret technological breakthrough that cannot be revealed to the public. The Grief was reported destroying important data and instruments from within the company’s security protocols...

He closed the video and opened a jpeg file; it contained a picture that looked like blueprints. The strange thing was how simple it seemed, it was the blueprint of a watch.

“This, is you adoptive father’s ‘billion dollar idea’, a blueprint of a time machine,” It was not supposed to make sense, but I wasn’t confused, it was like deep down I knew, “He sold it to the chain of companies that are currently being sabotaged by The Grief. Imagine what a nice scam that is, selling something and then getting a friend to destroy it for you. You get the money, but nobody else gets anything.”

“Are- are you saying that Uncle Martin and The Grief are working together?”

“If I was your uncle, that’s what I would do,” He said, and sat down again, “I get rich without anyone else being able to use my device. Very selfish, but very smart. Everyone thinks I’m one of the victims, but really it’s all part of the plan.”

The Grief has been booming up the news lately, but I couldn’t believe that Uncle Martin would be in cahoots with him. I looked at the minimized video file again, it was typed in all caps:

THE GRIEF NEWS REPORT

“I could tell you where The Grief is,” He looked at me as if to check if I was lying, but I wasn’t and he saw that too, “If you tell me what this has to do with you.”

"I just want to go back, there's this girl I missed out on," He looked sincere, "I wasn't able to take her the way I wanted to. I just wanted to show her a good time, she fought and I had to hurt her. I want to make things different."

"Okay. Creepy." I said, slowly dialing the emergency sequence, "Anyway, about The Grief."

"Yes, Jonathan Gray may pretend like he was erased from existence, but I know he's disguised as The Grief," He said, and took a Taser out of his pocket, "Where is he?"

"He's..." I looked the electricity crackling through the device he's holding, knowing my nudity will protect 0% of my body, "He's not Jonathan Gray."

"What?" He stopped in his tracks, dumbfounded.

"You missed out on some information, my friend," I said, and stepped out of the way. The stranger was tackled by G from behind, pinning him face first to the ground. I didn't tell him, but the mention of *his* name was enough to remind me of all I lost, and all I gained. Realizing who The Grief is was easy. I looked at the screen again:

THE GRIEF

I let my thumb hover over the bottom of the letter E.

THE GRIFF

I can't help but smile with my ingenuity, but Griff was pushed aside by the stranger, and he yelled at me to run away. Once again, I find myself running from trouble, only this time, Johnny wasn't by my side. I ran out of the apartment, still naked, and I can't help but laugh at my predicament. Once inside the elevator, I kept on laughing thinking how I found myself naked and endangered by some psycho again. Someone entered from the 3rd floor, it was a little boy, probably around 6 or 7. His mouth was wide open the whole time and I just smiled at him, he didn't say anything until the elevator dinged to the ground floor.

"Thanks for the show," He said, and I can't help but smile at him more, knowing that someone else besides a time travelling pedophile actually appreciated my naked body.

I borrowed some unfortunate man's coat from the coat rack in the lounge, because no matter how exciting it is to be completely naked in public, I still have a shed of decency left. I went outside wearing a heavy wool coat, and I just kept on running. I was barefoot and the cold cement hurt my soles, but I kept on going. It was already evening and getting even darker, so I thought I should find a good place to rest.

I found myself in a large urban basketball court, currently empty thank god, and found a steel bench to sit down on. I used the coat as a dress to sit on because I don't want my bare ass to make contact with the dirty metal. I shivered as the night grows colder, hoping things would be safe by tomorrow. Before I knew it though, a bunch of guys in suits were coming from different alleyways. I got up and started to run, but the suit guys covered every exit, and I was cornered to a big concrete wall. I don't know how I took time to notice, but the wall had graffiti on it:

A big red dynamite strapped with a wristwatch was drawn on the wall, with fat multi-coloured letters spelling:

THE TIME BOMB IS HERE!

Chapter 3: The Pedophile Prodigy

You were standing in the wake of devastation,

You were waiting on the edge of the unknown...

Out of nowhere he showed up, taking down two of the bad guys blocking the alleyways. It was all a quick blur, but I think I saw him grab one by the shoulder and kick the back of his knees all at once, and then he broke the neck of the kneeling enemy. Before the others could even react, he dashed to another one and tripped him with a circling kick to his legs, but before the guy could finish falling he slammed his elbow down on the man's torso. He was too fast to the point that everyone was taken by surprise, they didn't have the time to scream in pain as one of them tried to punch in reflex and got his hand caught and arm broken with quick jab to the outstretched elbow. After breaking the man's arm he spun the man around to throw him at the others. Someone tried to attack him from behind but quickly squatted and punched upwards, his fist connecting with the attacker's jaw. When it was all over, he was the last one standing, everyone else was either *incapacitated* (knocked out) or dead.

The man walked over to me, his eyes sharp with killing intent, his brushed up hair shining with hair gel in the moonlight (he could've used a hair wax, you know :3), his lightly shaved moustache shows an air of superiority. He wore a white long sleeve with the sleeve rolled crudely up to his elbow, and the two top buttons unbuttoned. He wore a small black vest on top, the one with the plunging v-neckline? I forgot what it's called. His pants matched his vest, both being colored black; instead of a formal pair of black dress shoes, though, he wore black combat boots with the edge of his pants tucked in.

I smiled, he looked so different from the last time I saw him, but he still looked the same to me.

"Hey Johnny," I said, trying to stop myself from shedding tears of joy, "What took you so long?"

"Sorry," He said, rubbing his neck like a fool thinking of a stupid excuse, "I got a little distracted, sweetheart."

I rushed to him with arms wide open, and he hugged me back. I held him as much as I could, thinking I might lose him again. I didn't hold back the tears anymore, I cried all night while hugging him, and he didn't let me go even for a second.

"You found me again," I said, in between sniffles.

"Of course," He said, lifting my chin with his fingers like he always did, "It's the only thing I'm good at."

"You son of a bitch!" One of the bad guys said, along with some sputtering of cough and blood, "Who the hell are you?!"

"No need for you to know, once I leave the perimeter," He looked at me while pinning the guy down with his foot, concern written all over his face, "You're going to forget all about me."

What did he mean, I wonder, that he would just be forgotten by staying away? Well, stranger things have happened, I guess. Besides, he still hasn't told me about what happened to him that day he sacrificed his existence for us. I watched him as he interrogated the lone survivor of the attack. The only information we got so far was that the men were employed by a man called Professor Valentine in order to shadow my every move. Apparently he knew that I would lead them to Johnny, which he would probably kill just to get the secret of time-travel.

I was both in shock and awe as I saw how bad-ass Johnny had become. The way he took all of my assailants so fast was very unlikely to how I remember him. There was a time I was almost rape by some criminal, and Johnny had a hard time fighting him. What happened to him, to the point that he resembled a killing machine now? He hasn't told me yet, but that guy liked to keep secrets. Nevertheless, I plan to find out.

Johnny suggested that we go back to the condo, leaving the man to die. I looked at him, he looked at me, and we held hands. The grip was the same as the lover I remember, although you can feel that he's gotten rough. I looked at him again, this time we saw eye-to-eye, and he was still as sweet as I remember. If he became a different man, I would probably notice it, but despite what he did a while ago, he was still Johnny. I decided it was best just to ask him.

"What happened to you, Johnny?" I asked, looking straight ahead.

"Time happened," he said, and I remembered the way he liked to be mysteriously wise, "Apparently I was the cause of the Big Bang."

I couldn't understand what he meant, but I remember hearing something about a Big Bang. I knew I should have been paying more attention to the things I watch. I urged him further to explain, but he said he will explain it all later, so Griff and Martin could know to. All of a sudden I remembered Griff was still fighting Professor Valentine in the condo, and told Johnny it might not be a good idea to go there right now.

"Hey, have you seen my moves a while ago?" He said, putting on his most arrogant grin, "Whoever this Valentine guy is, I'm gonna kick his ass."

This time, I truly believed he will.

It was already dinnertime when we got to the condo, Griff and Martin were waiting for us with the pizza I got delivered. Regardless of Johnny's month-long absence and inexistence they still acted like just a bunch of pals screwing around. A punch to the arm, a high-five, the usual stuff; I'm surprised to see it on time-travellers that get into constant life-threatening trouble. Despite all the things they've been through, you wouldn't expect them to look so...normal.

The pizza was delicious, and for once after quite some time, we were having fun again. I asked Griff what happened to Prof. Valentine, and he said that the dude ran away and vowed to return another day after Martin arrived and Valentine lost a 2-on1 battle.

“Guys, you would not believe what I’ve been through,” Johnny said, saying it like it was just no big deal, “Turns out I was transported to the beginning of the universe, and I had to travel to this timeline.”

We were just eating pizza, unable to comprehend why or how that happened to him. Finally, Martin decided to speak up.

“The beginning of the universe,” He asked, wiping his greased fingers on a tissue, “Considering that, how did you get here, to this time?”

“I waited.” Was all he said, his face serious yet munching on a pizza. We all stared at disbelief as we try to imagine how long he could’ve had to wait.

“That must be hundreds of years ago!” I said, hoping to be right.

“Make that billions of years ago,” Martin said, patting my head. I giggled but stopped after realizing how long that would mean. I tried to compute how old Johnny would have to be after waiting that long, but Martin did the thinking for us again, “You’d be past a billion years old, if that would be the case. But unless you’re immortal you can’t possibly live for more than a hundred years.”

Martin asked all of this with a raised eyebrow, and Johnny never stopped to think for an answer, as if he’s already seen this coming.

“Technically, my existence was erased,” He said, pacing around the room like a teacher, “That’s why you couldn’t remember me, not at least until you saw me or found evidence of my anomaly. I’m a man who doesn’t--shouldn’t, exist; I didn’t age a day, my metabolism stayed the same. I was, one way or another, immortal.”

“Wow!” I exclaimed with Griff and Martin following suite (except Martin said something like “Holy fuck!”)

“The boy who waited,” Martin said, and he and Johnny chuckled at a private joke, “Doctor Who reference much?” And they started laughing hysterically, while Griff and I were staring dumbfounded at the two yahoos. I took advantage of the opportunity to steal the last remaining pizza and cause the others to scream “NO!” in defeat.

“You may be immortal, or a genius, or a vigilante bodyguard,” I said, holding the pizza braggingly and triumphantly, “But I will always have the last slice of pizza.”

And with that speech, dinner was finished and we all spent some quality bonding--something we've needed for a long time. We watched whatever we could find on the cable, Fox's Top 20 countdown was all we found interesting, and we each sat down with a cup of ice tea blend Johnny mixed up(Martin refused the iced tea and went for a beer instead) .

I was in Johnny's arms the whole time, while sitting on the sofa or on the floor, he wouldn't let me go. It was awfully quiet for a while, regardless of the hilarious footage being shown on TV. Luckily for me, Johnny broke the silence with a whisper.

“Hey,” he said to me, “I've visited a lot of historical places and events you know.”

I looked at him, not knowing what he's getting at, and just said, “That's awfully nice, visiting where and whens. If you've really visited a lot they should call you a visitor.”

“The Visitor, huh,” Johnny said, and laughed, “That's a nice title to have, although a bit weird. Then again I like being weird.”

I laughed at his joke and he smiled, and then kissed me on the forehead. My heart felt as fluffy as a pillow, and my arms automatically wrapped around his neck. As I buried my face in his chest, enjoying his warmth, he held me closer and whispered something in my ears.

“I've been a visitor for so long, but I've never found a when or a where for me to stay,” He said, and I looked up at him, wondering what he means, “There was no place, no time worth staying in. But you know what?”

He kissed me again, this time on the lips; A simple lingering contact between his lips and mine, so simple yet so powerful. He lifted my chin with his fingers, and rested his forehead on mine.

“It was never the when or the where. It was the who.”

He hugged me again, and after realizing what he meant, I cried tears of joy. Silently, I wept, and listened to him finish.

“It's time to stop being a visitor. I've found the who worth staying with.”

Chapter 4: A Violent Valentine

How can they say: Johnny, won't you come back home?

'Cause everybody knows you don't

want to give yourself up

Tell the truth, and God will save you

I finally did it, I managed to do a proper, movie-like, and romantic way to confess to the girl I love. This one felt more real than the confession I did before in her room, probably because I wasn't using love as an excuse to keep a secret this time. We slept together again that night, but this time, we made out. We didn't have any kind of sex, just plain making out. You know, kissing and dry humping. She suggested we go all the way, but I told her we should take it slow. Get mad all you want, dear audience (especially the ones that are like me), I usually grab an opportunity as soon as it presents itself, but not this time. I wanted to make her first time special, not just a heat of the moment kind of situation. I was thinking of taking her to a nice beach, or maybe to a bad-ass theme park, but basically make it like a honey-moon. If possible, I'd get married with her; I think Pakistan just legalized marriage to children younger than 12 recently. Maybe we could go there, get married, convert religions if need be, then go to a nice place for a honey-moon.

I have been through a lot. Surviving billions of years can change a man, I personally thought of making an intro speech just like in the TV series 'Arrow':

My name is Jonathan Gray

For billions of years I've been stranded with only one goal,

Survive.

Or something like that (apologies to those who don't get my reference).

Anyway, I'm surprised I'm still human after everything I went through, and for awesomeness' sake, I'm not telling...yet. Point is I'm tired, and this is actually the first time I'm going to get some real sleep, so I slept like a log. Or like a baby. Or like a log baby. As I slept, I held Shirley next to me, missing the feeling of her flesh next to mine. I remember a line from a Mayday Parade song:

She slept safely in my arms, we were so young and invincible...

And so I slept, thankful for this respite I've finally got. Whoever this Professor Valentine was, I'll deal with him when the time comes.

The time came, apparently, the next morning.

I woke up on my own, Shirley nowhere to be found. I felt a pang of paranoia in my heart, something that says 'Here we go again', or something like that. How many times does she have to be taken from me, and right under my nose too. I saw Martin sleeping like a KO'ed boxer by the couch, and Griff bleeding on the carpet.

"Damn it Griff!" I shouted as I ran towards the wounded man, "What the hell happened?"

He had lacerations all over his body, small cuts that don't seem to be that deep, but he was bleeding nonetheless.

"It's Valentine," He coughed, spitting a bit of blood in the process, "Asshole spiked the beer and Pearl Harbor-ed us."

I looked over at Martin, he was still asleep despite whatever may have happened, and strangely enough, so was I.

"I'll be fine," Griff said, his breathing starting to stabilize, "Just get me a first aid kit, I don't think his goal was to kill any of us. He just took Shirley, and left a message." He handed me a calling card with a tribal tattoo-styled heart printed on it:

Mr. Jonathan Gray,

You are invited to the death of Shirley Temple, on the top floor of the Empire State Building. Bring the time machine, and let's end this where it all began.

Love,

Prof. Cornelius Valentine

I took a first aid kit, threw it to Griff, and proceeded to wake Martin up. When he was wide awake and sober, I asked him to prepare the time machine, knowing that he still kept it.

“By the way, Griff,” I told him once he finished patching himself up, “The beer wasn’t spiked, it must have been the ingredients for the tea, why do you think he gave up so easily before?”

“Then Martin...?” He asked, pointing to my friend.

“Was just really drunk,” I said, and no matter how pissed we were at the situation, we managed to laugh.

It took us a while to get to The Empire State, but we managed to use the elevator all the way to the top. We breathed sighs of relief when we were not riddled with bullets when the elevator doors opened. I looked at both Griff and Martin; we were all dressed to kill. Martin was wearing an all-black coat-and-tie outfit, looking as sharp as ever. Griff was wearing his brown 1930s formal attire, the kind with high-waist pants and matching fedora. I was wearing what I wore yesterday, so I looked a little unkempt, but I always like looking like a renegade office worker.

We prepared for a fight too. Griff had two Colt .45 pistols in his body holster under his coat, Martin had some smoke grenades from his office (I wonder why), and I had me. Don’t ask me what I meant by that, though if we do get in a fight, I’ll be able to prove my statement either right or wrong. God I hope I’m right.

He was waiting with his back turned away from us, probably enjoying the view in the observation deck. Last time I was here, I remembered, the observation deck was wrecked because of the storm. Everything looks calm and peaceful now, and yet I feel an overwhelming aura of chaos. It was a beautiful day, and this Valentine in front of me is planning to ruin it. *Not if I ruin him first*, I thought. I saw Shirley by his side, asleep and probably unconscious. Valentine seemed uncaring about our arrival, still looking at the horizon even after I cleared my throat. Griff had his hand in his coat, probably preparing to shoot, while Martin kept looking around, scouting for enemies I supposed. After a while of deadly, unnerving silence, the bald man with a strange mustache finally spoke up.

“Beautiful day isn’t it?” He spoke with the calmness of a psychopath, but then again, so do I.

“Untie her and give her to me,” I said, equally calm, “And you get to walk away unscathed.”

He just laughed a strange comical laugh where he put his hands on his hips and merrily guffawed with his head tilted to the sky. I inched closer, but he stopped me by pointing the bottom end of a walking cane I didn’t notice he had. The cane was pointed straight at my throat, if I wasn’t quick enough he could’ve choked me just by ramming my neck with that thing.

“You know what I want,” He said with a smirk, “Mr. Time Traveller?”

“Frankly,” I replied, trying to act cool while backing away from his cane, “I don’t. You wanted the wristwatch didn’t you, so obviously you want to be like me?”

“Yes and No,” He said, whisking the cane away and twirling it like a dandy gentleman, “I want to time travel, but this is not about some strange sick fantasy that I want to fulfil.”

He walked past me and stopped just a step behind me. I could feel his presence only inches away from my back, my friends a little farther but I know they’re vigilant.

“I made a mistake, and all I want to do is fix it.” He said, then slammed his cane to the ground, “Kill his friends.”

“NO!” I turned to look, only to see the cane swinging my way. I jumped back, missing the cane by mere centimetres. I saw a bunch of goons in formal attire again, making their way to Martin and Griff. I saw Griff and Martin putting on their gasmasks, and knew what they planned on doing next. I could’ve balanced myself after the dodge, but decided to faint a stumble and fall ass first to the ground. I wasn’t sure if Valentine was expecting that, as he tried to slam his cane down on me; I kicked his knee to trip him down, and swiped my foot at his face as he was falling. Before he could even realize what just happened I was already up and running towards Shirley.

I looked back at Griff and Martin. They were hidden in a huge cloud of black smoke while their enemies are coughing and covering their hands trying to figure out where they were. All of a sudden, bullets started riveting out of the smoke, missing no targets. In a matter of seconds, about half of their enemies were already down. Most of the shots were aimed at parts of the body that can maim or disable without killing. Kneecaps and shoulder blades were hit, and the goons were soon writhing on the ground in pain before passing out completely.

This was all part of the plan, of course. Before going here we made a strategy for different contingencies. This was contingency number three, Valentine relying on his goons to take us out. A lynching would get our asses kicked, even with my combat expertise. That's why I devised a plan to reduce enemy visibility allowing us to thin them out before they could even do anything. Most of my ideas were inspired from Batman, but never mind that. I mean, doesn't that seem awesome; the whole *'disappear in a puff of smoke and take the enemies out before they knew what hit them'* gig?

I got to Shirley just as she was regaining consciousness, I checked if she was hurt or anything, and tried to find a safe place for her to hide. She was still a little groggy, and I think the spiked ingredients from the iced tea must still have its effect.

"Shirley, wake up," I said, hurrying to make sure Valentine doesn't get the jump on me, "Here's the deal, though, you need to find someplace safe to hide."

"Johnny?" She said, and then rubbed my cheek with her right palm, "What's a *dildo*?"

"I save you and that's the first thing--" I begin to say, noting that my last statement must have been misheard when Shirley seemed to finally snap out of it.

"Johnny watch out!"

I knew it, but I never liked surprises and that's why I'm always ready for them. I've been keeping an eye on my reflection from the shiny metal surface Shirley was propped on, and I saw Valentine swinging the cane down on me again. I rolled to the left to dodge, but remembered Shirley might get hit by the cane so I kicked my right leg up to block the cane from hitting her. The cane was pure steel, and it made full contact with my leg. The cane, regardless of how simple it looked, was pretty painful when it hit, almost making my right foot limp from temporary numbness as I stood up to face Valentine.

"Don't you dare hurt her," I said, my teeth grinding with a building fury, "Or I assure you, death will be the least of your problems."

"Please," Valentine replied with a grin surprisingly akin to mine, "I was aiming for you, If she got hurt, it would've been because you dodged."

While we were talking, a goon flew past us and slammed dead on the wall, with lots of large holes in his torso. I looked over to where he came from to see Martin carrying a shotgun. Shirley saw the dead body and scurried further away from it.

“Johnny!” She said, “I’m scared...”

“Don’t be,” I replied, and then looked at Valentine with a smile, “Somebody else should be scared right now.”

Valentine laughed, and swung his cane in circles again. His all red formal attire with matching heart-print tie makes him look like a big joke. But with the way he hit me with the cane, I’ll say this guy knows how to kill. I saw a spark in his eyes and prepared myself. He dashed at me, the cane still swing circularly, and attacked with quick, multiple cane strikes that seemed to be aimed at my vital organs. I used my arms to swiftly block each of them, and used my feet to aim at his legs. He saw what I was planning and sped up his footwork, dodging my low kicks while trying to strike my upper bodyparts. I tried to look for an opening but his combat technique was pretty fast, the only way I could think of to stop him is to take a blow and abandon defence for offence. The problem is, if I gave him a chance, I might not be able to hit him at all once he lands a hit. After all, these attacks were aimed to weaken and disable me, countering recklessly would assure my loss.

I decided I couldn’t hit him while he had the cane, and jumped back again to set some distance. I dug deep inside for all the things I learned before I got here, hoping for a technique that I can use for this situation.

“I saw what you did before to my boys,” He said, staying at his place and steadying his cane, “You seemed like a smart fighter, but you can’t beat me like that. I’m a smart fighter too, you see, I’ve had training from the best martial arts mentors available. Any attack you’re thinking of, I’ve already seen and prepared a counterattack for.”

While he was talking, I calmed myself down to remember the teachings of all the ones that I met in my journey.

“I’ve got more experience than you, you know,” He continued, “I’m older, I’m smarter, basically I’m better. The only thing I envy from you is your machine. You’re just a nobody who got lucky, my friend. I was born this good, and I trained to be better. Afterwards, I used my skills to protect the things that I want.”

“You’re just a psychopath with training,” I replied, and he didn’t even flinch at my words, “I did my research, every child you help you coerce into either sleeping with you or doing things for and with you.”

“Those were for the kids who couldn’t afford my monetary fees,” He said, then chuckled to himself, “And besides, they had no choice!”

Professor Valentine, a teacher at a very sophisticated school in England. Considered a genius by his colleagues, he helped teach elementary students with college level subjects in exchange for a handsome fee. His techniques were considered a miracle as most of his students were capable of entering a university at a disturbingly early age. Any further background was clouded with mystery; most information about him had been deleted from every internet archive I found. And if there’s anything I hate more than a man who hurts or forces children to do things, it’s a man who I can’t figure out. So I decided I’ll just take him down.

I started walking towards him, emitting killing intent while maintaining a calm aura. I didn’t smile or anything, just my favorite poker face. I did smile at Shirley though, telling her everything’s gonna be alright. For once, Valentine looked disturbed, like he finally realized that I’m not as simple as I let on. I flexed my right knee to charge for sprint. Valentine saw it coming, and dashed out to strike first. I fainted by using my flexed knee to roll forward instead. I ended up going under him, stood up as quick as I can, and swung my leg to kick his exposed back. He reacted pretty quickly, spinning around and using his cane to block my kick. Arrogant as I may seem, that was the whole purpose of my attack; I bent my knee mid-kick to swing past the cane, extended my legs again to swing back. The strategy worked, my leg swung back just in time to disarm him of his cane before he could retract it. The cane skidded away from him, and as he looked at it from afar, he started to finally look pissed.

“You think you’re better than me?” He said, quite furiously, “You almost died in this very place before, but this time I’ll make sure...”

He struck out a barrage of punches and kicks, pretty fast for someone that hits so hard. I blocked as much hits as I can, but I couldn’t see all of them coming; just when I thought I had blocked one blow, two more hit me somewhere else before I could even block again. He swung a fist at my face, I blocked it and countered an uppercut with my free hand; the same fist I blocked before was already gone and blocking my uppercut, then another fist clashed with my stomach. As bursts of pain seared through my body, I clutched my abdomen trying to figure out what my best strategy would be; I looked up, but before I could do anything, his foot swung at my face, and I felt myself fall down sprawled on the ground.

I watched in horror as Johnny got kicked down by Valentine. The bald man was surprisingly fast, no matter how smart Johnny fought, if the enemies too fast, then how could he beat it? I stood up, wanting to help Johnny, when he looked at me-- that determined look of his, and shook his head. I've seen that face before, I thought, during that time in the cabin and when we were trying to stop the storm. I know what that look means: *I'm either gonna do something stupid, crazy or both*

"Johnny," I whispered, knowing he couldn't hear me, "Please stop sacrificing yourself for me..."

As tears welled up my eyes, I looked at Johnny to hope he doesn't get killed.

To my surprise, he was winning.

Valentine started attacking fast again, punch and kick, and lots more of that. Johnny, on the other hand, wasn't blocking any of them. He had his hands in his pockets, and it almost seemed like he was dancing through the fight. Valentine uses a left hook; Johnny skips and spins around it, his feet moving pretty lithe and faster than I remember. He wasn't fighting back, he was just dancing around Valentine, dodging his attacks and seemingly taunting him.

"What the hell?!" Valentine shouted, spinning around and panting as he tries to figure out where Johnny was, "Are you even taking this seriously?!"

"That's what scares you," Johnny said, smiling and still dancing around him, skipping around and tapping his combat boots to an inexistent rhythm, "To see me playing around like a child. While you exert all your strength, I'm just dancing around you."

He looks at me; it was difficult to stay focused on him as he moved around Valentine like they were on stage. Finally he stops, abruptly in front of Valentine as he stomped his left foot to the ground, making a sound that reminded me of my tap dance sequences with Uncle Bojangles in my movies.

When he stopped, Valentine saw his opportunity and shot a fist straight to Johnny's face. He deflected it with a raised left hand, hardly showing difficulty. Valentine was panting, while Johnny was standing right in front of him, smiling.

"You were too fast for me to take head-on," Johnny said, "I had to devise a combat technique to tire you out."

"So you decided to prance around me," Valentine said, furious, "That's it? A stupid dance?!"

Johnny laughed at that, and tapped his feet while skipping backwards, as merrily as possible. And to my surprise, he did a little tap dance number. His combat boots clicking every time it hit the ground, his hand gesturing and taunting Valentine to fight. Valentine attacked, but Johnny sidestepped and punched Valentine's outstretched arm, dislocating his elbow. As he cringed in pain, his other hand holding his elbow, Johnny swept him from under his knees with a swing of his right leg. And then, as if everything moved in slow motion, Johnny spun along his spinning kick, rotating fast enough to land his right foot on the ground, raise his left leg all the way up like a split, and slammed it down on the falling bald man. The force of his axe kick was so strong, the concrete cracked a bit where Valentine fell. Before he could catch his breath, Johnny's boot was pinning his chest down.

"Didn't I tell you?" Johnny said, a grin on his face, "I trained under lots of mentors too. My little adventure through history got me fighting alongside Aztecs and Apaches."

He looked up at the sky and breathed some good fresh air.

"Even trained under Genghis Khan, for a while," He said, "Then got me in a ninja clan, accidentally. Basically I went through a lot before I made it here. If you think you've trained with the best fighters, I've trained with the ones that created them."

"Even the tap dancing?" Was all Valentine could say. Johnny looked at him and laughed.

"Nah, nothing big there," He said, "Convinced the owner of The Meglin's Dance Studio to tutor me with the art of tapdancing. After all..."

Johnny looked at me, and I can't help but smile after realizing he studied under the same teacher as mine. But there was more to his look, he's done a lot of stupid and crazy stuff in his life since I met him, but the tap dancing beats all of it.

"After all, I've fallen in love with a tap dancer."

Chapter 5: I Write Sins Not Tragedies

And we don't even know where we're going

But I'm standing with you and I'm glowing...

I put my shotgun down, while Griff reloaded his guns to be sure. After the cloud of smoke dissipated there were a lot of unconscious goons scattered around us. I never thought I, Martin Newman, would ever get the chance to fight bad guys in such an old fashioned way. I saw Jonathan beat the shit out of the bald guy, all the while tap-dancing, so I assumed we won. But I never thought that Valentine's plan was never to kill us, but to get the watch.

And he got what he wanted.

After being sure that the threats were down, I reloaded my guns but holstered them. I kept my hand at the ready in case anything dangerous came up. My only mission was to keep Shirley safe, perhaps a strange notion considering in this day and age my employer would have been long dead. But right now, among all the new technologies and lifestyles I'm stuck in, it was the only thing that made sense. Being Shirley Temple's bodyguard was the only thing left for me to be.

And I failed at that.

Everyone's so concerned about me; they end up hurting their selves to keep me safe. I hated that, but I loved them more for that, too. Maybe I've got a hero complex, or something. Perhaps they thought Valentine would hurt me, or worse. They were too busy keeping me safe; they lost sight of the other things they had to protect. I watched Valentine steal the Time Machine from Johnny, and I couldn't do anything to stop him. So much for Shirley Temple, I thought, if only this was one of my movies when a sudden miracle saved the day.

But not this time, this time the bad guy got what he want, and the consequences were dire.

This time, Shirley Temple will be no more.

I watched as he steals the Time Machine from my pocket, and laugh triumphantly as he kicked me off. I lost my balance, but not my cool. I stood up, brushing dirt off my pants, and backed away to my friends. A strong gust of wind forming around Valentine, he spoke once again.

"Too bad, Gray," He said, with a huge smile in his face, "I win! Now all I have to do is go back in time and alter the past."

I smiled, and so did Martin. Griff and Shirley had no idea what me and my best friend were smiling about. So me and Martin decided for a combo explanation.

“Didn’t I tell you?” Martin said, “That thing was not made to alter the past.”

“That Time Machine makes you a visitor,” I said, “**The** Visitor.”

“We’ve fixed the machine so it won’t cause another time storm.” Martin said.

“It allows you now to go back in the past and experience it,” I followed-up, “You can be a part of it, but you can’t change it.”

Valentine looked perplexed, his eyes bigger than ever. Sweat was all over his face as he looked on at us, and shouted.

“NO!” He said, clutching the watch tightly, “That’s not possible!”

And as he faded to travel back in the past, I said:

“And lastly, we decided to give your trip a little twist,” I said, “That thing’s dead set to bring you to the exact time and place of the Chernobyl Nuclear Meltdown event.”

Shirley held my hand; Griff and Martin were beside us, as we smiled at the demise of our villain. He screamed and tried to get rid of the watch, but it was too late, the vortex was open and he sort of warped, sort of faded away into hid doom. An explosion of bright lights temporarily dazzled us, but after that he was gone.

“Hey guys,” I said, looking at each of them, “What do you want for breakfast?”

The police were alerted, but we were long gone when they found the goons. We were busy eating burger steak at a fast food whose name I forgot (I'm pretty sure it had a "bee" in its name), since it happened to be Johnny's favorite fast-food meal. But there was one more in Martin's mind, and it was still about the fact that Johnny ceased to exist.

"You can't just walk around without an existence," he said.

"I can actually," Johnny said, but then his usual smile left his face, "But disconnection from people will surely make them forget all about me."

"But we didn't forget," I said, "Did we?"

"You forgot," Martin replied, chewing on a hash brown, "We all did. But when Jonathan came back, we all remembered."

"And that pretty much sums up my curse," Johnny said, finishing his food, "As long as we're together, you remember me; I leave you for too long, you forget. The good part being it's easier to stay outta trouble when you technically don't exist."

"Then all we have to do is stay together all the time!" I said, standing up and nearly spilling my root beer.

Johnny patted my head, but he was frowning. It's like one of those moments again when I can feel in my gut, 'he's going to leave me again'.

"It's not that simple," he said, while somehow I knew it, "Being inexistent doesn't allow me to stay at a certain area for too long. My nature of being an anomaly makes reality confused, so if I stay in a certain area too long, disasters and other weird stuff tend to occur more often."

"Is that possible?" Martin asked.

"What do you think killed the dinosaurs?" Johnny said, with a straight face. We couldn't say anything to that.

The atmosphere became a little grim after that conversation, and we all left the place feeling down regardless of our previous victory. Johnny can't stay with us, otherwise we could destroy the world; but if he leaves then we'll forget him. So I guessed there was nothing else left to do.

"I'll go with you instead," I said abruptly, probably catching all of them off-guard. Martin was obviously caught off-guard since he spit the soda he was sipping.

"WHAT?!" They all said. But I was dead serious.

"Shirley, we don't know what the consequences could be," Martin said, "You could lose your existence too, like him, or worse!" He said, pointing to Johnny.

"That's right," Griff said, kneeling down and holding both my shoulders, "I can't protect you if you go with him."

"Shirley," Johnny said, pausing a little longer than he usually does, "I can't risk that. You don't want this life I'm living. Not existing, that's worse than death; no matter how many friends you make, they eventually have no choice but to forget you. My lifestyle would make you feel so alone."

I went closer to Johnny and held his hand with both of mine. I gestured his hand to hold my chin like he used to. I looked up at him, straight into his eyes, and said:

"Not if I'm with you, and you with me," I never took my eyes off his, "And if we still feel alone, then we can be alone together."

I motioned him to carry me, and he did. I hugged him, as tight as I can, and then I kissed him softly on the forehead. As I rest my forehead on his, he whispered:

"Yeah," he said, "I thought I was done visiting, turns out I can never stay."

"Yes you can," I replied, "You can stay with me."

"I..." But he couldn't finish it, the man who always acted unfazed before me was finally losing his cool. Tears ran down his face, and through held back sobs, he managed, "I never felt so lucky in my life."

"And I've never felt like a star till you arrived."

"Yeah, guess the only important thing is we're together huh?"

I looked at him again, and we kissed. I never understood why movies prefer romantic tongue kisses, because we kissed in the simplest way possible. The way a child kisses an adult on the lips; a simple, yet strong vow. Trust me, nothing ever felt more romantic.

"It's not the where, or the when. It's the who."

Epilogue

[Griff]:

As I watched them wave goodbye, ready to go on adventures, I can't help but feel sad. Little Shirley, who I was tasked with protecting, has relieved me of my duties and gave the responsibility to her new 'boyfriend'. Regardless, it still felt like I failed as a bodyguard. But still, I am damn happy for them, and I wish them luck. I gave Jonathan my number and swore that I will never forget, so he can call me if he needed help. I'll probably continue on being The Grief, just to keep me busy.

[Martin]:

Jonathan has always been the lucky one. Even in high school and college, he always managed to get high grades without having to exert a lot of effort. Sometimes a wonder if he's really a genius, or super lucky, or both? Anyway, I still have a responsibility to get rid of the time machine blueprints that the other companies may have. Jonathan said something about going back to the Philippines first or something, but who knows, those two can go anywhere they want. Shirley decided to change her name, just for fun. Now Shirley Temple is no more, she goes by Jane Temple now. I was going to tease her about the fact that she just omitted her first name, but what the heck. For their sake, I hope trouble stays away for good, but I have my doubts.

[Jane]:

I'm so excited! Johnny promised to take me all over the world and try a lot of stuff. He knows a lot about different kinds of food and culture--thanks to his historical trip, so he's going to be my tour guide-slash-boyfriend. We talked about the whole boyfriend thing, cos he's afraid people might get the wrong idea. Well I just hope they get the right one, I'm not letting Johnny sacrifice his self for me again. We'll keep each other safe. No more acting, singing, or dancing; now is the time for living.

He closes the book and sets it back on his table. It was a dark room, dimly lit by a lamp on the same table. The table was filled with so many papers and folders. The book written by a man named Jonathan Gray was the thickest thing on the table. He shuffles through the other papers on the surface, looks at his corkboard full of pictures–faces. Lots of questions to be answered, things to be uncovered, his research has allowed him to collect a few information enough for a dossier. The papers had words like “Time Traveller”, “Demon”, “Superhuman Vigilante”, “Cyborg” , and other strange phrases tied together by a line of highlighter ink. He looks at the photos, one of a blond Caucasian man with a brushed-up hair and notable combat boots, one in a hoodie with his hands in his pockets, one of hieroglyphs taken from archeological finds, and one of a little girl with white metal surrounding her naked body. He’s amazed with himself for finding all of this evidence, but only one was certain...for now.

“The time traveller is worthy,” He says to himself, “But need to research on the others.” He pulls out a piece of paper with these words written on it:

The Visitor

The Stranger

The Incubus

The Future

He puts a check mark on the first one, and sets the paper down.

“The children are in danger,” he mutters, “These individuals better be the right ones to save them.”