

SAVING MILLICENT

Months of study was required to document everything they knew about this time. The documents were surprisingly abundant and amazingly detailed. Every bomb that dropped on London had been painstakingly detailed. Horace had worked feverishly to convince the young men at the university library that he was not totally mad, but exactly what he purported to be, a man from the past, who arrived in a time machine. He was seventy three when he finally got the physics correct to make his modified diner booth whoosh to another dimension. He had to chuckle at the elaborate versions of his device portrayed in the Hollywood movies and the Dr. Who television show. His device was definitely nowhere near as flashy.

To secure the help of the young men working so devotedly now, he had to arrange some mindless jaunts back and forth across the time space continuum, doing some ridiculous little acts to not only prove his claims, but satisfy some minor demands by the ones necessary to execute his plans.

With all that behind him, however, he could finally focus on the fateful day his precious Millicent had perished at the hands of a German Messerschmitt that strafed her street after slipping past the air defenses. September 3rd, 1940 his lovely bride to be left his office on her way home to prepare a supper for her family where he would ask her parent's blessing

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on their union. Before she could reach the safety of her home her life was snatched from her and him.

He checked, double checked and triple checked his figures for the umpteenth time. While he felt like he could do this as many times as necessary to get it right he had never had to, so had some doubt. His only recourse was to be absolutely sure he was going to land at the exact spot so he could intercept Millicent. He was nearly ready to try, but he needed Dwight Framingham to join his crew with the final pieces of information. Dwight was just finishing a Physics examination and expected to arrive at any moment.

Ten blocks from the lab Dwight was once more trying to explain to his girlfriend Camille why he had to be part of Horace's adventure. The disagreement concerning the project had strained their relationship to a breaking point.

"Tell me why you have to go," Camille asked.

"Don't you see? this is my doctorate theory in practice? If I can go with Horace and retrieve an artifact from the day it will prove my theory and enable us to make this technology usable for practical purposes," Dwight explained.

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“I don’t think that’s a good idea!” Camille declared.

“Why?”

“You are talking about changing history. What gives you that right? What makes you so confident your choices about whom and why will be any better than the ones made? What is to keep another who takes your technology from going back a few days more and starting something infinitely worse?”

Dwight stood speechless as he considered the depth of Camille’s argument. She had definitely delved much deeper into the complete process than he. The old man’s story had been so convincing he was willing to indulge his desperate attempt to save his “one true love”.

Horace checked his watch. The accuracy of his plan depended on Dwight arriving soon. His window was closing too fast and he never had missed his sweet Millicent as much as he did right now. Knowing his chance to save her was in sight buoyed his spirits. Of all the egg heads recruited for this massive effort, he felt Quentin was the most dependable. He seemed to get the urgency as well as the idea that it was worth bending the laws of physics simply to save his lost love.

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“Mr. Blakely, we must go very soon!” another lackey announced.

“Yes Forbender, I know!” Horace replied, unable to hide his irritation.

“What are we waiting for?” Forbender asked.

“Master Framingham has the last piece of information. I must know for sure we will land in Millicent’s path.”

“We must go, Mr. Blakely.”

“But what if I miss her because we did not wait?” Horace asked, panicked.

“If we do not go soon, we’ll miss the opportunity for another decade.”

“You are positive?” Horace questioned.

“All our calculations say this is true,” Forbender confirmed.

Horace let out a long slow breath. “Then we must go.”

Moments later the scenery flanking Big Ben began to blur.

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There was a loud crash in the hallway. Dwight Framingham frantically scrambled past the stack of debris created when he collided with a stack of books. Camille had told him if he left her for this foolish mission he should never come back. He had hesitated for a few moments before remembering a critical piece of information. His latest collection of bomb data proved an earlier source inaccurate that Horace Blakely depended on for his final coordinates. If the elderly man stayed there he would not survive to attempt his last ditch rescue.

When he burst into the research suite he saw only two people remaining. One was Stanley Brahm, a nerdy looking bloke from the school of engineering nearby and Amanda Stokes, the raven haired beauty Camille had chafed over when she was handpicked by Blakely as an assistant. Dwight had to be honest; there had been sparks between them on brief occasions. He had not sought the attention of this brilliant young woman, but their shared intellect drew them together.

“Amanda, where is Blakely?” Dwight asked.

“They are in 1940 London I suppose,” Amanda smiled and cocked her head.

“Does the other prototype work?”

“Why?”

“Blakely’s data is wrong. This,” he said proffering the new papers, “shows he will die from a direct bomb hit if he sets up where we discussed last evening. I have to go and tell him.”

“You’ll need another to get there,” Amanda said, looking at him with anticipation.

Dwight looked at Stanley, who stared silently at him as he realized the implications. In one swift movement he jumped up from his chair and fled the room. Amanda turned slowly to find Dwight’s eyes lock on hers.

“Right, well I suppose you are the best woman for the job,” Dwight said. Amanda’s face broke into a broad grin. She was ready for this.

“So, where do we go to miss the bombs?”

“Well I know this beautiful pond north of the city . . .,” Dwight smiled.

“Sorry, a joke. We must arrive at the eastern end of Trussley Road. But we must get off the street immediately when we arrive.”

“Will we get there in time?”

“Let’s hope so,” Dwight replied.

Seconds later they came to a rest on a cobblestone section of street that was remarkably clear. Dwight immediately exited their traveling machine and searched for some sign of their location. Amanda looked around too, knowing the urgency of the moment.

“There,” Amanda pointed at an ivy covered pole. Trussley.”

Dwight spread a period map over the back of a bench to find the street he and Horace Blakely agreed the night before was the best choice to try to intercept Millicent in time to prevent her slaughter. He rapidly scanned the map looking for the street name.

“Adie Road, Adie Road. Where the hell is Adie Road?” he asked no one in particular.

Amanda moved close to his side and ran her perfectly manicured fingers over the map, her bright red nail polish temporarily capturing his attention. He shook his head to clear the distraction as he kept searching frantically for the vital street location.

“Here!” he said when it finally showed up to the west.

“That’s three blocks,” Amanda said. “How much time?”

“Less than ten minutes, come on.” He took off in a run toward the direction he got from the map, with her close behind. Citizens of the city watched with amazement as the two strangers weaved their way through the streets on their way to some important destination. As he ran Dwight thought about all the death that was coming. Should he try to warn people? Would they heed the warning? How could he explain what he knew in time to help them and Horace?

He saw the last street before the intersection that would lead to Adie Road and felt a surge of optimism. The surge dissipated quickly when he recognized what had always been an antique report of an air raid warning siren. But this was no re-enacted scene. They were in 1940s London and thousands of people would be killed and wounded on this day. They did not want to be in that number.

There was a crush of people going in all directions when Dwight and Amanda finally reached Adie Road. Dwight tried to peer over the scrambling crowd for a sign of his mentor, but there were just so many people. Then he heard the rumble of aircraft and knew his time was short.

“We’ll never make it Dwight!”

Both Dwight and Amanda stood frozen as they watched the mass of people scrambling for safety. How in all this chaos could they hope to find the members of their team? Dwight cocked his head when he heard something familiar to his right. He wasn't sure, but it sounded familiar and he wanted to be sure he wasn't imagining.

No, he certainly was not imagining that. It was something he heard too much and found rather annoying. But at this moment it was the most beautiful sound in all creation.

"Listen, do you hear it?" he asked Amanda as he touched her arm. Amanda stopped to listen, although the drone of the planes was getting ever louder.

"It's Forbender; that dreadful song by Sir Elton. The one he plays all the time."

"Exactly, what is it? Lucy in the Kitchen?"

Something like that," Dwight smiled. "This way!"

They pushed through the crush of people, trying to close the distance between them and the source of music. Suddenly it stopped and they were no closer to their team. Dwight surveyed the scene quickly, but there were

no immediately recognizable faces. Amanda screamed as the first explosion rocked the street. Dwight tried to remember where their mapping had indicated the first blasts. He looked at the buildings and jerked Amanda's arm as he darted to the left down an alley just as a thunderous explosion erupted above them. Chunks of concrete wood and other debris clattered in the space behind them as they ran.

Two blocks down they turned back toward the crowd to return to the place they expected to find Blakely and the others. By this time much of the crowd was no longer on the street and searching was simplified greatly. "There!" Amanda pointed. It was Blakely, Forbender and three others, scanning the computer generated maps to verify where the next ordinance would land.

"Move away!" Dwight shouted as he ran toward them. Move from that place!"

When the pair closed some ground Forbender noticed them and began to wave. The expressions of the larger group reflected their uncertainty at Dwight's intentions.

"Move away!" Dwight screamed.

Blakely pushed Forbender and another to the right when he heard the high pitched whistle of a bomb from above. They dived behind a panel truck stopped in the street just before another explosion sent shrapnel flying all around. The sides of the truck absorbed much of the force, but there was still heat and other evidence of their close call.

Dwight dived across Amanda to shield her when a second explosion followed the first. They were in a bad place. This is what his new document had shown, what he knew would doom the team. They had to get out of here, and quick.

“Follow me!” he screamed to the others.

Scrambling through a narrow alley, the seven of them held their breath each time the tell-tale sounds of certain death found their ears. Two streets later Dwight stopped to rest and allow the others to catch up.

“My new data. . .”Dwight said between breaths, “Shows we missed . . . some of the hits.”

“Obviously,” Blakely smiled. “Thank you for making the trip to save us!”

“We must hurry,” Amanda said, checking her watch. “It is nearly time for Millicent to leave.”

The group followed Dwight as he darted across streets as they made their way toward her route. For Blakely his whole life's work would culminate in the next few moments' efforts. He just wanted a second chance to prevent the death of his precious Millicent.

"There she is!" Blakely said excitedly. "Some things can't be forgotten."

"No, you cannot be the one," Dwight cautioned.

"He's right," Amanda agreed.

Blakely knew his protégés were correct. All he could do was admire the pretty brunette from afar as his team saved her life.

Dwight and Amanda joined hands and approached Millicent as if they were a happy married couple.

"Could you tell us how to get to Cooley Place?" Amanda asked.

Millicent smiled and nodded, stepping away from her route to show them the way around the corner.

Seconds later the Messerschmidt roared down the avenue and unloaded its deathly fire on those remaining in the street.

“You saved my life!” Millicent said.

“It seemed you saved ours also,” Dwight smiled.

After they were sure Millicent was headed home on a safe path, they returned to see Blakely, tears streaming down his face.

“Thank you. Thank you. Thank you ever so much,” Blakely said. “I have spent years chasing the tail of my darkness,” Horace Blakely said.

For so many years it had been nothing more than a dream or at best a wish that he could zoom back to September 3, 1940 and scoop his beloved Millicent from the path of harm. Now she was safely headed home and their time was running out to return to England of 2014.

“We must go,” Dwight said.

Amanda shared the tears Horace wiped from his face. The devotion of this man was what inspired Amanda to sign on to this unlikely project. Of course the science was an attraction also, what with the possibility of flying through time.

“Yes, we must!” Horace agreed.

“Even though it is in the midst of such a horrid time London is still so gorgeous,” Amanda assessed.

She ducked like everyone else as another explosion rocked the street.

Dwight unrolled the bomb map again, double checking the route they had to follow back to their transportation devices.

Forbender, Blakely and the rest of the original team transported first, quickly followed by Amanda and Dwight. Back at their present day lab, the team stood looking at their creations, knowing what Blakely said when the project began.

“We must destroy these machines when this is over. The ability to do wonderful things will always be balanced by the opportunity to do something so heinous that we cannot allow for the possibility.” That was the original statement Blakely made when each of them agreed to help him and no one had any reason to believe his opinion would change now.

“Gentlemen, we know what is next,” Blakely said, confirming his original words.

Dwight looked at Amanda for a brief second, and then set about dismantling the pertinent part of the device he and Amanda had used.

Within an hour the deed was done. Blakely stood with his arms crossed when the room fell silent. He could now put all this behind him and get

back to his scholarly pursuits. The difference would be that the longing would be gone.

“Tomorrow you will remember none of this, but my gratitude will never end,” Horace told them. His misty eyes confirmed the words he uttered.

The next morning in Horace’s flat the angelic voice of his lifelong love pierced the morning silence.

“Horace, what is the purpose of this?” Millicent asked. She flipped through a notebook of scribbles her husband had made. There were many drawings along with the notes and equations, but none of it made sense to her. She chose a path of difference from her egghead husband, choosing to be a mother.

“It is just something of a dream,” Horace replied.

“Time travel?” Millicent said reading a smattering of his words. “For what purpose?”

“Who knows?” Horace said. “The possibilities could be endless.”

“So could the trouble,” Millicent said. “How could you use this to help one without helping all?”

Horace shook his head as he thought about her question.

He looked at her favorite painting by the French master Paul Cezanne that hung on their living room wall. “Wouldn’t you love to talk to him?”

“Of course, but that is something that could never happen and I am realistic enough to understand that.”

“I suppose you are right,” Horace agreed.

“Promise me you won’t pursue this. I know you and if you had a good enough reason you would devote your life to making it happen.”

“I promise,” Horace said.

Back at university a pair of girlfriends stopped for a break in the school greenspace.

“Who is that?” Amanda asked a friend as they walked across campus.

“Which one?” her friend replied. They were watching a couple of young men as they made their way toward the central campus common area.

“On the left, the taller one.”

“That is Dwight Framingham. He is a physics major. He comes from the northern coast.”

“What about the other one?” Amanda wondered.

“He is Hollis Forbender, a real egghead. He goes on and on about time travel. He says he is going to be the first to travel back in time someday.”

“I think he has watched the telly a bit too much. Time travel is a myth. I would never try that myself.”

“Yes, I could never see you following such a foolish dream,” her friend replied.