

Throughout my life I have been called weird. From the crazy words I make up, the ridiculous dances I do, and just the way I view the world and how strange people are who are considered to be “normal”. But what is normal, and who decides what it is? Are we meant to be limited to what our “normal” can brains do? Are we all supposed to dress a certain way, eat all the same things, like all the same things, live the way the majority of society lives? Or are we meant to live beyond the bounds of society’s norms, to envision crazy ideas, dress in unique ways, or go wherever our imagination can take us? One outlet of this “weirdness” for me has been storytelling. Through story there are no limits to what our own minds can create. We can go anywhere we want to go, be anything we want to be, and live out every dream we can dream up. So I wrote a story about how something that seems like a normal part of life. Something that everyone seems to overlook and never really take into consideration, what would happen if we didn’t have it, if it didn’t exist? Time to me is weird. Time makes up our lives. It is the key to how we perceive every-thing, from the tick of our own minds to the events which define our passage from birth to death. We can reasonably imagine a universe without color, or without light, but can we imagine a world without time?

## There's No Time

By

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Paul Reed was awakened by the blaring of his cell phone. The intro to “Sweet Child of Mine” filled the room, one of those famous guitar riffs that doesn’t seem to exist anymore. Paul turned in his bed, eyes half shut to block out the intruding light, and reached blindly toward the light on his nightstand. He didn’t recognize the number, so he was hesitant to answer. He finally slid his thumb across the screen. On the other end, a female voice spoke. Paul recognized the voice immediately. It was Alissa, the girl he had been in love with in high school; he could recognize her sweet voice no matter how much time had passed.

Paul had first set eyes upon Alissa when he started as a freshman at Aurora Central High School. When the petite blonde first spoke to Paul, her voice alone melted his heart.

“Military, I assume?”

Paul was speechless and stood frozen, gazing into her glassy blue eyes.

“No need to say more, I can spot your kind easily from the dread on your face. And that haircut.” Alissa let out a cute little laugh that made Paul smile.

Paul knew immediately that this was where he needed be, where he wanted to stay. Time seem to freeze every time he saw her. Paul fell hard for Alissa and thank God she fell, too. The two never left each other’s side. Paul knew that this was the person he was going to spend the rest of his life with. A fire burned deep inside him and he could see that same fire in Alissa’s eyes. Her gaze, her touch, her kiss, Paul could feel true love. A love so true that it could never be

broken, at least, that's what Paul believed until he came home one fall evening and saw the U-Haul sitting in the driveway.

Paul's father was a Major in the Air force so Paul had been to numerous schools in more than 12 states. Paul thought he would eventually settle in to this lifestyle but quickly found out that this was something he would never get used to. As soon as Paul was beginning to settle down and make friends at a school he liked, it was time to move again. Paul knew his father never understood. His father would always say,

“I'm sorry bud, but it's outta my hands.”

But Alissa was one he would never get over. Alissa broke down when Paul told her.

He knew his heart would never heal and Paul hated his father for this. Their relationship had never been a close one. Paul never showed his true hatred, but it was there and he thought his father was to blame for that hate. Paul had never forgotten the night when he was six years old, when his mother came into his room. The creak of his bedroom door and light shining in from out in the hallway had woken him up. His mother crept quietly across the floorboards and walked over and sat down on the bed beside him. She was crying, and as Paul's eyes began to adjust he could see the black tears running down her face.

Paul sat up in his bed.

“What's wrong, Momma?” He wiped sleep from his eyes.

She turned to him and placed a hand on his face. Paul remembered her smiling through the wet mascara as it rolled off the sides of her face, fell to his bed, and instantly dissolved into his Star Wars bed cover. Paul put his hand to his mother's as she gently caressed his face.

“Promise me, little Pauli, that you'll be strong and that you'll never give up, no matter what. Promise me that you'll always be strong.”

Paul didn't understand what was happening or what his mother meant by all this. But when morning would come he would understand everything.

"I promise, Momma," Paul said.

Paul sat there half-under his bed sheets, staring at his mother crying in the dim light, for what to him seemed like an eternity. He didn't know that it would be the last time he would ever see her again. Paul's mother tucked him back into bed, kissed him on the forehead, and told him goodnight. She shut the door quietly as she walked out of his room.

By the time Paul woke up the next morning, his mother was gone. He walked into the kitchen and found his father standing at the window staring blankly out into the summer morning. He was holding a cup of coffee in one hand and a crinkled piece of paper in the other. Without turning around, his father said, "Please don't blame me for this, son. It's not my fault."

Paul said nothing.

His father was staring at the wedding ring on his hand as he repeatedly tapped it against his *World's Greatest Dad* coffee mug (a gift Paul had given to him for father's day, one of the many gifts paid for with his dad's money). His father sipped the last of his coffee and set the mug in the sink. He removed the ring from his finger and laid it on the counter, along with the note, and walked out of the kitchen.

Paul had never heard from Alissa after he moved, hadn't seen or heard of her in fifteen years. Paul sat up anxiously in his bed.

"Alissa?"... "Is this Alissa ... Rose?" "How did you ---"

But before Paul could finish, Alissa interrupted him.

"Listen to me. I don't have much time to talk but there is something that I have to tell you," Alissa said.

Paul wondered what Alissa wanted to tell him and why now for that matter. Why would Alissa want to speak to him now?

Alissa said, "Before I go, Paul...I just wanted to tell you that I have always---"

A loud gritty static grew loud over Alissa's voice and Paul couldn't make out the rest of what Alissa was saying.

"Alissa?"

"Are you there?"

"I can barely hear you," Paul said, almost yelling into the phone as the static grew louder.

*"I'll always---"*

Alissa's voice slowly began to fade out.

"I---"

"Alissa!"

The static was overpowering Alissa's voice. Paul began to panic. Hearing only half of what Alissa so badly wanted to tell him, was wracking his brain.

Then there was a beep from Paul's cell phone. The battery was dying. Paul looked down at the screen, which was flashing erratically. The lights from the number pad began flickering randomly. The phone seemed to melt in Paul's hand. He could hear faint murmurs from Alissa, but her voice was quickly fading. His heart and body seem to grow tighter as if a pair of massive hands were squeezing him. Paul felt an intense pain shutter throughout his body. The room around him began to curve and expand as if the space around him was bending. The air began to grow dense, taking the breath from his lungs; Paul began to panic. He held his hands to his ears as pressure in his head grew and the sound around him began to shake and warble (later Paul thought the sound reminded him of an enormous piece of thin metal being vibrated with over

exaggerated intensity). As the sound grew louder, Paul began to feel sick to his stomach, felt that his head would explode. Then, in that instant, Paul disappeared. Disappeared from the very time and space where he existed.

When he came to, he was standing in the living room of a house. It resembled the house he lived when he was six. He could hear commotion in another room. Paul walked to the edge of the doorway. He could hear a man and woman arguing.

*“I never wanted this. I never wanted him.”*

*“How can you say that? He’s your son.”*

Paul walked into the room where the man and woman stood arguing. He froze. Before him were his own mother and father, just as he remembered them 20 years ago. They both turned and looked at Paul.

“Hey, who are you? What are you doing in my house?”

Paul’s father started toward him. Paul panicked and ran through a door at the end of the hallway. He was in his childhood, and there in the bed lay a boy, the same boy that was awakened by his mother that tearful night. It was Paul.

*This can’t be happening. It’s gotta be a dream. This isn’t real.*

But it was real.

Paul was beyond confused. He was terrified. He disappeared.

Paul awoke. His head felt a hangover from a whole bottle of Jack Daniels. Paul was on the floor in what appeared to be a hospital. The scene was total chaos. There were people rushing around, some in their pajamas as Paul was; some in suits and some in casual clothing. One man sat up against a wall bleeding from his eyes, screaming. People were hurt and injured and some people were lying dead on the floor. Papers flew around as if in a wind storm. Paul noticed there

were endless hallways of doors with bright pulsating white light, like lightning flashes. A woman was sitting in front of a computer at a service desk in the center of one of the hallways. She was an older woman with silvery white hair; maybe late sixties, Paul thought, but in a way she seemed as if she was much younger. She looked scared, manic. Her hair was a mess and her clothes were worn and disheveled. She looked as if her very life had been sucked out of her. Paul approached her. “Who is responsible for this place”? She spoke. “I am, and you are. Everybody is.” The woman rambled frantically. She stood up from the desk and muttered to herself. “How long have I been here”? The woman looked toward one of the corridors and rushed down it. Paul got around to the computer where the woman was sitting and looked at the monitor. On the screen there were words and numbers scrolling up the screen in bright green lettering, like on those old computers he remembered from elementary school. Some words and numbers Paul recognized and some he didn’t. There were an innumerable amount of dates—andplaces, Paul guessed. For a moment, he thought he caught a glimpse of the word *earth* and maybe today’s date and year but the screen was rushing through the lines of character. Paul tried to use the keyboard to no avail. He looked around and wondered where the doors led. He wondered what this all meant. He was perplexed.

A young girl appeared. There was an uncanny resemblance that reminded him of Alissa.

“Paul?”

Paul replied. “Yes, how do you know me”?

“You have to come with me.”

“Why? What the hell is going on around here”?

“There’s no time.”

The girl reached for Paul’s hand and began to lead him. Paul stopped her.

“Wait, do you know what this is? Is it the government? Aliens? Where the hell are we?”

The girl turned to Paul. “We’ve screwed up. Big.”

“Who?”

The young girl’s hair blew around in the wind as she stared up at Paul.

“You, me ... Us. We failed.”

Paul wanted to pull away from her, but there was something, a sweetness in her voice, that made him stay.

The girl grabbed Paul’s hand and led Paul running down the corridor. Running to where, to when, to where only God knows, if God even knows where this where is.