

The Door to Tomorrow

As he entered the café for lunch, Richard Gastelo experienced one of those uncomfortable situations where he happened to look at a stranger just as the person looked directly at him. Not wanting to appear to be staring at the stranger he immediately looked away while trying to act like his gaze had just accidentally fallen upon the man. Desperately he wanted to get another glimpse of the stranger because there was something terribly familiar about him, but Richard just couldn't figure out what it was.

To Richard the man appeared to be in his late sixties or early seventies, about average build, and with silver gray hair. There was just something so familiar about the face and eyes but he just couldn't place what it was. Trying to be as nonchalant as he could muster he let his gaze once again cross the location where the stranger was standing. The man was still looking directly at him. Now who should be feeling embarrassed? Still, this was very uncomfortable for Richard and he purposefully headed for the counter, sat down and concentrated on not looking back at the stranger.

Checking over the menu as he sat there, Richard was able to forget for the moment about both the stranger and his minor embarrassment.

The waitress stopped in front of him and asked, "Would you like some coffee?"

"Yes, please, with cream."

"There you go," she said pointing to the cream dispenser as she poured some strong looking coffee. "Do you know what you want?"

In his mind Richard's mental answer was, Yeah tell me who that guy is over there. "I'll take two slices of the sausage and pepperoni pizza." Then Richard could see in the reflection of a chrome napkin holder that the stranger was still there and still facing him.

"You got it," she said as she walked away to retrieve the already cooked pizza slices.

"Thanks." As he turned around slightly to try to get another look at the stranger, his elbow bumped someone standing next to him. "Oh, excuse me." Richard said as he began to turn back thinking better of trying to get another look.

"No, excuse me. Can I join you?" the stranger said with a too familiar voice.

"Uhhhh, I'm sorry. Do I know you?"

"Well, yes you know me very well and no you don't know me."

"Huh?" Richard felt woefully inarticulate.

"Perhaps if we could discuss this privately while you eat I can explain."

The waitress placed the plate with two pizza slices in front of Richard. "Thanks," he said almost absentmindedly as she turned and walked away.

Richard's curiosity was on overdrive. "OK, Uh, how about right there?" he said indicating a nearby unoccupied booth.

"Of course; after you," the stranger said with his hauntingly familiar voice.

Richard picked up his plate of pizza and his coffee and the two of them walked over to a booth in the corner of the café. Placing his food on the table and sliding into the seat he asked, "Maybe we could start with your name?"

"Certainly, my name is Richard, but my middle name is Andrew and you can call me Andy for convenience," said the stranger.

"That's quite a coincidence. My name is Richard too." The fact that his middle name was also Andrew was something he decided not to share with the stranger. Instead Richard

looked even more closely at Andy. “You know, you just look so familiar. We must have met somewhere?”

“Well, no we haven’t exactly met before, but you do know me and have for a long time. I was trying to think if there would be a better way of explaining this, but I think I should just explain it to you exactly the way it was explained to me.”

“And that would be?” Richard prompted.

“I’m you.”

“Pardon me?”

“I am you.” Andy repeated.

“What do you mean you are me?”

“Well, I’m about fifty two years older, but I assure you I am you. Or looking at it the other way around, you will become me.”

“So you are going to tell me that you are me and have come here from the future, or something?”

“Precisely, and wow I remember saying that?” Andy smiled.

“What do you mean you remember saying that?”

“Well, we’re going through something I remember happening to me fifty two years ago right here in this very café.”

“Fifty two years ago in this very café? This place was only built two years ago.”

Richard protested.

“Not for me. For me this place was built about... uh, fifty-four years ago although it’s looking a lot better now than it did in its later years. Of course it was torn down a long time ago.”

“OK, yeah, I get it. You’re from the future. You realize I’m still not buying this right?”

“Yeah, I know. I didn’t buy it at first either,” Andy said as he smiled briefly. Then he continued, “Just humor me for the moment and assume that what I am telling you is true until I can manage to convince you which I will do by the way. In the mean time, just try to hear me out.”

“OK. You’re me from the future and so you have to be here for some reason. I mean, I’m just guessing people don’t travel through time to visit themselves just for the fun of it, right?”

“Precisely. I really am here for a reason.”

“Which would be?” Richard asked following it with a sip of coffee.

“This isn’t going to make much sense, but it’s really important that you unlock a certain door before you leave work...” Andy glanced at his watch, “today.”

“OK, I hope you don’t mind me telling you just how nuts all of this sounds do you?”

Laughing, “No, of course not. I remember how nuts it sounded to me too?”

“When?”

“Back then... uh, I mean now. Well, when I was on your end of this conversation.”

“Hmmm. Well, suppose you tell me why it is so important for me to unlock this certain door.”

“I can tell you in general, but there are some parts I really can’t tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because I need to make sure that you do what you are supposed to do but don’t know all of the details because that might change the outcome.”

“It’s like this. In the future you will be working for the Time Continuity Directorate. This is an international organization that has been exploring time travel and the stability of our timeline. Over the last few years our researchers have determined that there are certain highly unstable points in our past. In each case, if a pivotal experience does not happen in exactly the right way the existing timeline will be disrupted catastrophically.”

“What do you mean catastrophic?”

“I mean that the change of a single event could actually lead to major wars, famines, destabilization of governments, and in some cases the end of humanity on Earth.”

“Oh, come on now. Me unlocking a certain door, or rather not unlocking it could lead to the end of the world?”

“Well, yes and no. In reality you unlocking that door will just stabilize the timeline so that the events that must happen will happen without any changes. I’m here to have you do this to provide the additional stability.”

“And you talked yourself into this before?”

“Yes as a matter of fact that is right. My older self did talk my younger self into this.”

“And what happened?”

“Uh, hmmm, I’m sorry I can’t tell you exactly, because I didn’t tell me exactly before either.”

“You mean you don’t know what will happen?”

“Oh, I know what will happen, but I believe it is best that you know as little as possible. I know in hind sight I eventually appreciated having known as little as possible.”

“So you’re telling me I’ll be thankful I didn’t know more?”

“Yes... in the long run.”

“And you still want me to believe you are really me?”

“Yes, but I can prove this to your satisfaction.”

“How?”

“Well, we could compare finger prints, but it would be easier for you to ask me about something that only you know. Anything. I already know what you will ask, and I also know the answer. So you just go ahead and ask.”

“Anything, huh?”

“Yes.”

Richard searched his mind for the most obscure thing he could remember from his early childhood. Something no one knew and something he had never talked about.

“OK, I’ve got it. What girl did I have a crush on in the third grade?”

“That would be Jane Simpson. You thought she was really pretty, but you were afraid to ever let her know. One time you even slipped a note into her desk, but you were too afraid to sign it so she never knew where it came from.”

“How could you know that?”

“Easy. It’s all right up here where it’s been ever since the third grade,” Andy said while tapping the side of his head.

“Wait! I’ve got this scar on my right hand where I gouged a finger when a drill bit snapped while I was building something.”

“Yes, this scar right here,” Andy said while extending his right hand which still showed the scar. “You never told anyone what you did because you were afraid your dad might get mad about the drill bit you broke. You threw the broken bit in the trash. I guess he probably always thought he had just lost it.”

Richard stared intently at Andy.

“My God, you ARE me!”

“Yep, in the flesh.”

“OK, so how, I mean when, or who...”

“Richard, there are some things I can’t tell you. If I did you might not do certain things the way you would normally do them and that would affect the future. Now, I do know that I can tell you the things I remember being told myself fifty-two years ago because those are part of our history in this timeline. Does that make sense?”

“Well sort of. I think this is giving me a headache.”

“Yeah, it is. I remember. Here,” Andy said while offering Richard two aspirin tablets that he was already holding in his hand. “I remembered you would need these and I gave them to you.”

In a daze Richard accepted the aspirin tablets and just looked at them.

“It’s OK really. The fact that they are from the future doesn’t make them any less aspirin. They’ll work.”

Richard popped the two tablets into his mouth and followed them with a sip of coffee to get them to go down.

“You’ll feel better in a little while. I did.” Andy assured him.

“Thanks. I guess.”

“OK, so now you believe me.”

“I guess you would know.”

“Yes I do,” Andy said smiling.

“So this door thing. What door are we talking about and what can you tell me?” Richard asked.

Andy produced a piece of paper from his coat pocket and unfolded it on the table between them. “Here. This is the sixth floor of the building you work in. This room in the corner is just some storage, but that door happens to be locked at the moment. I don’t know who locked it, but you have the master key for these rooms and tonight before you leave you need to unlock that door.”

“That’s it? Leave a storage room unlocked?”

“Yes.”

“How long does it need to stay unlocked?”

“Just one day?”

“Then I lock it back up?”

“After that day you just do whatever.”

“You or somebody going to steal something from that room?”

“No. There are only boxes of books stored there and no one will steal anything.”

“So why didn’t you just make sure whoever locked the door didn’t lock it in the first place.”

“We simply don’t know how the door gets locked, but we do know that you have to unlock it because I remember all of this, and I did unlock the door. It really is necessary that it be unlocked.”

“This is pretty spooky.”

“Yeah it is, but it has to happen,” Andy said while refolding the piece of paper and placing it back in his pocket.

With a deep sigh Richard responded, “OK. You got it, or I got it, or... well... you know what I mean.”

“Yes. I know, and I need to be going now.” Andy glanced at his watch.

“Am I going to see you again?”

“Sorry, that’s one of the things I can’t tell you. You understand.”

“I guess I do.”

“Richard it’s been good to see you. Better eat that pizza. It’s getting cold.” Andy extended his hand and the two of them shook. “I have to go now. You take care.” Andy stood to leave.

“You too,” Richard said as Andy turned and left the café.

Richard finished the two slices of pizza and downed the last of his coffee before leaving a tip, paying his bill and heading back to work. Throughout the afternoon he kept wrestling with what he had been asked to do. It just didn’t make any sense. What could possibly be so important about a storeroom door? Finally he just accepted that the only way he might ever find out is by doing what he had told himself to do.

Just before leaving work Richard went upstairs to the sixth floor and found the storage room in the corner that had been pointed out by Andy. Placing the key in the lock and turning it he discovered that indeed the door had been locked. Out of curiosity he opened the door and looked inside. Yes, there were just some storage boxes and a window. Richard shook his head and closed the door. I guess we’ll see, he told himself as he walked away.

The next morning at work things were pretty uneventful for Richard. He noticed there seemed to be a lot of talk about something that was going to happen but he hadn’t been paying much attention. Richard had been pretty busy with some repair work he was doing, but when he noticed it was after twelve o’clock he began feeling quite hungry.

“I think I’m going to go get some lunch,” Richard said to Eileen Williams who he had been working with that morning.

“What and miss it?” Eileen looked at him with a frown.

“Miss what?”

“Oh, you! Come on, I’ll show you.”

“Where are we going?”

“Up to the fifth floor to get a good view.”

“View of what?”

“You’ll see. Just come on.”

Richard followed Eileen up the elevator to the fifth floor. As they got off the elevator he could hear a lot of excited talking and see that everyone was crowded around the windows.

“Here, over here. There’s space.” Eileen prompted.

Richard glanced at his watch thinking how hungry he was. It was twelve twenty nine. As they squeezed into place the motorcade was just coming into view.

“There he is! There he is! It’s the president!” Eileen exclaimed.

The car made the slight left bend in the road in front of the building and was traveling away from them as they heard the shots ring out. Richard looked up where he heard the sound coming from and realized that the storage room he had unlocked was on the sixth floor right above them in the Texas School Book Depository.