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to k and b,
with all the love my heart holds
and for the loves we've lost

So.

You know that saying “Time is undefeated”?

This is a story about the time that Time lost.

HOW TO SAVE NO ONE

My face is mashed sideways against the trunk of a police cruiser when Kate dies for the third time. The box meant to save her life is smushed near my feet.

I've learned a few lessons along the way.

For instance: *don't waste time on clothes.*

It's cold out, easily sweater weather. I'm in short sleeves, plaid pajama shorts, and a pair of beat-up Chucks I wear to mow the lawn. The insides are damp, and there's a clump of grass in my right shoe scratching my toes, but there wasn't time for socks. Socks, and weather-appropriate attire, are a luxury. They take time. And I can't waste any.

Not tonight.

Not ever.

Because big lesson number one is this: *all the time travel in the world can't save the people you love.*

45 Minutes Earlier

The police are already here.

A marked car, idling beside the emergency room entrance. There's a chance they're here for me, but there's no turning back. Split seconds matter. I grab the small package sitting on the passenger seat and hop out of my car. I rip open the box, jam its contents into my sneaker. I pick up my pace.

I should've left earlier.

Should've done a hundred things differently this time around.

I push open the door, thinking, *Get to the elevator, make it to the fourth floor*, and then I run face-first into a concrete wall. Also known as colliding into three hundred pounds of beef and nightstick.

Ah, this must be the driver.

I nearly crumple onto the wet floor, except the officer snares me by my T-shirt.

"I got him," he mumbles into the walkie holstered on his shoulder. "Back outside," he orders me, pushing open the door, his other hand hugging his gun grip. "Come on, kid. Let's go." All sorts of things run through my mind—acts of valor, courage. I think about pushing past the officer and bolting for the stairs or slipping inside the elevator before it closes. But in the end my legs are spread apart, my hands cuffed behind my back.

Part of me thinks, wonders, hopes: maybe this is it. This is the solution. I'm not supposed to be there. If I'm not there, she'll live.

They rattle off my crimes, and after breaking and entering, I stop listening. I don't bother trying to explain, because how do you explain you're from the future?

"... you understand your rights," they say more than ask.

I nod, the aluminum trunk cool and sticky against my cheek.

"You have anything on you? Weapon, drugs, or the like?" the large officer asks.

"No," I lie. Because I can't tell the truth. Not now. Rough hands slide up and down my body. My keys jingle as he fishes them out of my pocket. Then he removes my wallet.

"Nothing interesting," the large officer says to his female partner.

"Have him take off his shoes?" she suggests.

And my knees nearly buckle.

"Please," I plead, "just let me go inside. My girlfriend's dying. Check with the doctors, her nurses. Please. Just *five* minutes. Please. A heart, have a heart. Just let me see her for five minutes and then you can haul me away to prison, throw away the key, whatever. Please. Think of your kids. Do you have kids? If they were dying, would you want them to be alone? Please. *Please*."

I try dropping to my knees to beg, but it's tricky when you're being physically restrained. The officer who put the cuffs on me looks over to the other one, a dirty-blond-haired woman with bloodshot eyes, and she sighs in that studied way that all mothers must learn on the first day of Mom School. But then she nods her head. And the cuffs come off.

Which is beyond crazy.

"Don't be stupid, kid," he says in a voice that makes me think *he thinks* I'm going to do something stupid.

"Five minutes," she says. "That's it."

They walk on either side of me, assuring me as we march the greasy linoleum floors and ride the we're-trying-to-hide-the-piss-smell-with-bleach elevator to the fourth floor that if I try anything funny they will not hesitate to lay my stupid ass out. But I'm not going to run. I check my watch again. There's a chance.

Except the elevator door hesitates for twenty seconds before finally hiccuping open. And then we're forced to detour down another hallway because a maintenance man is mopping the floors and apparently takes his floor-mopping very seriously, because he starts shouting and jumping up and down. The

officers mumble apologies, but the man just points angrily toward an alternative route, also known as The World's Longest Possible Way Around.

I try to explain that we don't have time for detours, for tired elevators, for wet floor signs. But no one listens. And when we get there it's nearly too late.

Kate's almost gone.

"Well, look who it is," she says, her eyes blinking open. In the corner, the chair her mom normally occupies is empty. A crumpled blanket on the floor beside it. A lipsticked Styrofoam cup on the windowsill.

"Hey," I say. For a second I'm taken aback at how small she looks. The room is quiet, except for the hiss of oxygen pumping into her nose, the drone of IV fluids chugging into her arm.

"What time is it?" she asks, squinting. Even at three in the morning, confined to a hospital bed, she's beautiful.

"We don't have a lot of time left."

Her face twists in confusion. "What are you talking about?" She leans forward in her bed, glances over my shoulder, wincing. "And this time, you brought the police with you. Interesting move. You really know how to make an entrance, Jack King."

I look back at the officers. "I'm sorry about them."

"You're crazy, you know that?"

"I can see how you'd come to that conclusion, yes," I say, smiling.

"*Five*," the female officer reminds me.

Kate shakes her head. "Jack, why are you here? I don't get it,

man. What, you have some morbid fascination with hospitals, is that it? Or do sick girls turn you on?"

"I came here to tell you . . ." My voice trails off because I haven't really come to *say* anything.

"What, Jack?"

"I think I know what I'm supposed to do now. I think I've figured it out. Finally."

"Okaaaay," she says, her eyebrows sliding up. Clearly, I'm only confusing her. Of course I am. Because none of this makes any sense.

"You're going to be okay, Kate. Everything's going to be okay."

She turns away. "Everyone keeps saying that, but they're lying. Don't be a liar, Jack. Not like—" She stops when she sees what's in my hand.

Because for the last twenty seconds I've carefully worked my fingers into my shoe. And now I have it.

"Jack," she says, her voice rising. "Jack, what the hell—?"

But before she can finish I yank back her blankets and fire the syringe into her thigh. She lunges forward, like I've hit her with a million electrical bolts.

The police tackle me to the ground, shouting curses into my ear, into the room. "*What the—!* What the hell did you just do, kid? What the hell was that?"

"Someone help," the lady officer screams, running out in the hall. "We need a doctor in here! We need a doctor!"

The man officer presses my face so hard against the linoleum

it's a wonder my brain doesn't rupture out of my eye sockets. Legs and feet come rushing into the room. Lots of shouting and screaming, and people keep shaking me and asking me what I injected her with, what drug was it, and the truth is I wouldn't know exactly how to explain it even if I wanted to. But I don't want to. Because this is the only thing that I could do. This is the only way.

While the doctors scramble to save her life, the officers drag me across the wet floor, across the lobby, back out into the night.

I know that if I make the tiniest move, if I even breathe too hard, they'll probably shoot me. Or at least knock me out cold. But it doesn't matter. Because I got a peek at the clock on my way out of Kate's room. And if things happen like before, then either Kate lives, or any second now it starts again.

The male officer has a thing for smushing my face, because now my cheek is back against the cruiser. I'm guessing he intends to search me more thoroughly this time.

"If that girl dies, I'm going to—"

But I feel it hit me before he can finish. I close my eyes. The air already peeling, gravity ripping away from me like a pulled parachute. The tremors are nastier this time, too. I can barely stand. My body one long violent vibration.

"Kid, are you okay?" He barks an order to his partner, tells her to go inside for help, and she darts off at full speed, but it doesn't matter. She won't make it in time. If I could talk, I'd tell them not to worry. That I'm not dying. I'm merely buffering.

That I was trying to save her. Not that they'd understand. Not that I understand. The first time it happened, I thought I was a goner. But now.

I don't know how to describe it except that it's like my body's preparing for launch. You know, if my body was a highly evolved space shuttle and space shuttles traveled through time instead of just into space.

"Kid, listen to me, talk to me! I think he's having a seizure. Kid! Kid!"

Oh yeah, lesson number two:

Time travel hurts.