

The girl from '24

I SHOULD have kept walking.

I heard the voice from behind and hesitated a moment. We don't have street people here. Oh sure, occasionally one will show up, but the merchants on this block promptly remove, or have them removed. It has been awhile since I encountered one, last summer there was a guy who appeared in the afternoons. But, at 7:30am on a Saturday morning in mid-September? I'd be hard pressed to think so. Frankly, I have nothing against street people, I really do understand their plight. But, early on a Saturday morning, before I had my coffee, I'm not ready or able to deal with and should have kept walking. Without question, it is what I should have done. But, I did not. I stopped. I waited. I heard her voice again.

"So sorry to bother you, but I could really use your help."

I turned to face her. Dressed rather nicely, at least at first glance, she certainly did not appear to be a street person. The woman stood around five-six or so, with short heels on, appeared to be mid-twenties, short brown hair, thin in stature, quite attractive, but I digress.

I took a deep breath and walked toward her. I noticed she stood inside the door way of a closed up shop, and not that it mattered, I could not remember what had been there before.

"Thanks for stopping." She took a breath. "I'm really in a jam."

She looked around, then looked me over. I stood six feet, casually dressed in jeans and a pullover on a Saturday morning. For the record I'm in my late twenties, still trim and fit at 180, but again, I digress.

"What seems to be the problem," I asked with concern.

"Can we go somewhere and talk?"

My first thought was why, but wondered if maybe she got dumped by a boyfriend, or husband, who left her there. I stood silent for a moment, but a coffee shop would be public enough for a place to talk. I slowly nodded.

"I'm on my way to our local coffee shop, nothing fancy, unless you want fancy, but they make a decent cup of regular coffee. We can go there to talk, if that would work for you."

"Yes." She smiled with relief, said thanks again, and stepped in beside me. I noticed her dress in the sunlight this time and seriously wanted to ask, what is up with the dress. Although, I must admit, she did look damn good in that dress. We entered the coffee shop. I turned to her.

"Regular will be fine."

I ordered two regular coffee's and led her over to the condiment set up, where I proceeded to pour cream into my coffee. I offered the pitcher to her, but she declined. Looking around, I pointed to a table in the back where we sat. Two sips of coffee later, I had to ask.

"May I ask you a personal question?"

"I think so." She lifted her coffee with both hands and savored a sip, before looking up at me. "Thanks for the coffee by the way."

"Sure. I apologize for asking, but what are you wearing? I mean, your dress. It sure is different. Some new fashion I don't know about. Although, you do really look good in the dress. Sorry, didn't mean to be forward. I only meant to say. Well, anyway."

She looked down at herself, observing what she did have on, took a moment to process what she saw and with a sudden realization smiled, let out a small laugh and waved her hand in the air.

"You would not believe me if I told you."

"Try me."

"It appears to be a simple flapper style, covering a white silk camisole underneath, white short silk bloomer bottoms, roll up stockings and basic shoes. Available at most dime stores anywhere in 1924." She paused and looked up at me with a nervous smile. "Not completely sure why I know that."

"Excuse me? Did you say nineteen, as in Nineteen ... Twenty-four?"

"Yes."

"Really? Would you mind explaining why your are wearing clothes from a hundred years ago? And may I say thanks for the intimate details, as well."

"A very long story. Well, maybe not so long as complicated."

"Okay. How about I refill our coffees. Do you want something to eat? A Danish or breakfast sandwich, maybe. I could get you either."

"A plain bagel would be fine."

I waked back to the coffee urn and filled our cups, added cream to mine. Then stopped by the counter to order her a plain bagel and myself a breakfast sandwich. I set the fresh coffees down on the table.

"Okay, food is on the way. Let me have it."

She took a breath. "You sure you want to hear this?"

"Yes. Besides, we have food coming now, so fire away."

"JOE," came loudly from the counter. I put my hand up to signal, hold that thought, and retrieved our food. She nibbled at the bagel, while I devoured my sandwich, watched me finish, and slowly began her story.

"It was around 2, maybe 2:30ish in the morning on January 1, 2025, early New year's Day. We were ..."

"Hold on! Wait a damn minute. Did you just say 2025? 2025 is three and a half months away. Are you telling me you're from the future? Seriously? Is that what you're saying? I mean, what the hell, lady."

She sat back startled, fear staring back at me. I leaned forward on the table and spoke softer.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to go off on you. But, you gotta explain? Please."

She cleared her throat and sat forward, again clutching her coffee with two hands and in a panic asked: "Tell me what today is?"

I looked at her confused.

"Please. Very important. What day? Please"

"September 14, 2024, a Saturday. Like I said, 2025 is still three plus months away, how can you?"

"Oh God, I did screw this up. Oh God, what am I gonna do now? Oh God. Oh God. What am I gonna do? Oh God. Oh God."

She put her head in her hands and started to sob. I reached over and touched her arm.

"Hey, It's okay. C'mon. Take it easy, okay? C'mon now. Whatever it is, I promise, I'll help anyway I can. C'mon now. C'mon."

She looked up and used her fingers to remove the tears. I handed her a napkin from the table. She leaned forward real close to my face.

"I don't know how to fix this."

"Maybe you should tell me the rest of your story first."

She sat back in the chair, wiped her face once more and took a deep breath.

"On January 1, 2025 around 2-2:30 am" She paused to look up at me, but I motioned for her to continue. "We were coming home."

"We?"

"My boyfriend and I."

"Right." I sat back into my chair. She noticed.

"Not really a boyfriend, but someone I had been seeing off and on for a couple of months. We happened to live in the same apartment complex and he asked me to go with him to a New Year's party at a friend's house down the street. I agreed to go and later we were on our way back to our apartment building. As we were walking down the street, we noticed, at least I did, a shop with the door open and a sign out front that said \$25. I looked inside and saw an old Gypsy woman sitting at a table and thought we could get our fortunes read to us. Sounded like a great idea to start the New Year. He said no and started to walk away, but I nudged him toward the open door. The Gypsy woman inside said she did not do fortunes, but at New Year's only, she offered alternative solutions to every day life. I asked her what did she mean. At that moment, he said we had enough of this crap and well past time to get out of here."

Suddenly she stopped, looking up at me, let out a laugh and shook her head.

"Sorry. I'm Jessica Bryant and the guy I mentioned was Bryan Littlefield. So sorry, I did not introduce myself before now. All this time. Well, I'm sorry. Jessica." She extended her hand.

I reached across and shook her hand. "Joe."

"Yes, I know."

"You know? How?"

"Nothing sinister. They called out your name when the food ready for pickup."

I looked over at the counter, back at her, she still held onto my hand. I let out a muffled laugh.

"Of course."

Jessica slowly let go of my hand, never taking her eyes off me, cleared her throat, slyly smiled and continued.

"I don't remember the exact conversation, but we were offered the opportunity to live through the year 1924 as an alternative solution adventure and return back the same day we left. No real time lost. A chance to experience life back then as it existed. But, if we did not return we would stay forever in 1924, a bit disturbing. No matter, it sounded awfully exciting to me, but Bryan was hesitant. I convinced him how much fun it would be to live a century ago, experience what life was like then, and would be an incredible opportunity, how could we not do it. I don't know why it appealed to me so, but it did and I kept pushing him to agree. He reluctantly said okay. Frankly, I think he agreed just to be with me for a whole year. Anyway, just a feeling I had, but I didn't care, because I really wanted to go. We were told to place our cell phones, keys, money, wallets and everything but our clothes in a basket. The Gypsy woman waved her hand toward the back of the place and said go. We stepped forward together ..."

At approximately 1:37am January 1, 1924, Elizabeth Wilburton, Nee: Raimondi, and her husband, Frederick Wilburton, were driving home from a New Year's Eve gathering when the right front tire blew out on their Ford Roadster causing the motorcar to pull hard to the right. As the motorcar continued to the right, the right rear tire veered off the road, which caused the motorcar to slip slowly down the embankment. Frederick yelled for Elizabeth to jump. Landing on her backside, she began to slide down the steep hill quite rapidly, bouncing over rocks, branches and other obstructions on the hill side. Frederick sensing the motorcar about to overturn also jumped free. Catapulted by the motorcar, he flew through the air before landing face down, barely missing a small boulder, but bouncing off a tree root, proceeding to slide rapidly down the steep hill face first. The

Ford Roadster continued the roll-over motion and by some miracle missed both of them as it bounced by.

Elizabeth finally stopped some twenty-five to thirty yards down the embankment, her dress and camisole gathered around her head. Her back and backside quite torn up from the hard ground of dirt and rocks, thoroughly shredding the back of her bloomers. One stocking was down around her ankle, the other caught at her knee. Both of her shoes were gone. She lay there unconscious, barely alive.

Frederick lay face down some twenty yards down past his wife. His face and hands torn to shreds, blood oozing from each. the front of his shirt shredded, the tie gone and the front of his trousers at the waist filled with rocks and dirt. If he was not dead already, he soon would be.

AT 2:10am January 1, 2025, Jessica Bryant and Bryan Littlefield stepped into the open door and confronted the Gypsy woman seeking to have their fortunes told. A short time later they both agreed to the alternative solution adventure to live the year 1924 together and at 2:21am passed through.

At 2:21 am January 1, 2024 Elizabeth Wilburton took a sudden breath and tried to rise up. She realized she was tangled up in her clothes and fought to free herself. Finally, she got them off and sat up, naked from the waist up and because of the damage to her bloomers, practically naked from the waist down. She further noticed her shoes were missing and her stockings were more off than on. Removing both stockings she stood up barefoot and after steadying herself, spotted Frederick some ways down the embankment. Stepping cautiously, she slowly made her way down to him. Once she rolled him over she could see the injuries he suffered, heard a gasp and faint moan come from his lips. She grabbed both legs and turned him so his head faced upward, hoping it would ease the bleeding.

Realizing she needed to get help she made her way up the hill. Better than half way up, she found the Buffalo robe she had been using in the motorcar, picked it up and draped it over her shoulders.

Elizabeth Wilburton anxiously sat huddled under the Buffalo robe, up on the road for more than two hours, before she finally saw lights approaching. Forgetting her state of undress, she jumped up and began to flag down the motorcar approaching, the Buffalo robe cast to the side. The lights came to a stop, but actually not a motorcar, but a delivery van, making early morning deliveries. The two men leaped out of the cab and came toward her. She frantically explained about the roll-over and that her husband still further down the hill. The two men comforted her. The older

man removed his jacket and placed it over her shoulders, while the younger man made his way down the hill. Shortly, he called out and the older man joined him at Frederick's side. Elizabeth, clutched the jacket close to her body watching as they stood Frederick up and slowly walked him up the hill. Frederick coughed and choked on the dust gathered in his mouth. Elizabeth and Frederick hugged, but the men encouraged them to get in the van. The younger man climbed in the back, while the older man drove quickly to town where they dropped Elizabeth and Frederick Wilburton at the local doctor's house. Elizabeth thanked both men, handed the older man his jacket back and thanked them again.

The doctor removed the last piece of Elizabeth's underwear and helped her lay face down on the table, while he cleaned and dressed her scrapes and scratches on her back, backside and legs.

Meanwhile, the doctor's wife helped Frederick out of his clothes, dirt and rocks fell unto the floor as Frederick lowered the suspenders and dropped his trousers. She helped him out of the shredded shirt and undershirt. After, she carefully washed his hands and face removing the dirt and dried blood. Fortunately, they were mostly surface scratches. She removed his underwear and gently washed his stomach and abdomen.

The doctor came over and gave Frederick the once over. Frederick's wounds were mostly superficial, with only one large cut on his right hand where he braced when he landed and a rising bump on his forehead with a gash next to it. The doctor instructed and nodded. His wife continued to hold Frederick steady, but when the doctor motioned, she went over to Elizabeth and began to wash down her back, backside and legs, including the bottom of her feet.

Frederick sat on a stool, while the doctor thoroughly checked him over. Elizabeth sat up, her backside quite tender, now completely naked and looked at Frederick, who also was naked. This may be how they planned to spend the night, naked together, but certainly not here. She wished Frederick a Happy New Year. Frederick straightened up and saluted back. They both had a good laugh together.

The doctor and his wife laughed with them understanding the absurdity of the moment. He suggested to his wife, she might want to get them something to cover up with. The wife smiled, took one last look, shook her head and left the examine room.

Out on the lonely road, the Buffalo robe lay off the side in the dirt. Elizabeth's shoes were a short distance down the hill. A little further down were her tattered dress and camisole along with both stockings scattered about. Pieces of Frederick's shirt lay scattered around, his tie no where to

be found. The Ford Roadster totally destroyed at the bottom smashed up against a tree.

However, Elizabeth and Frederick Wilburton were both alive, at the very least, for another year.

"... next thing I know, I found myself standing in the door way of that closed up shop where you found me, which may help explain why I am wearing these clothes. Anyway, I'm pretty sure I've been there most of the night. Someone passed by earlier, but when I spoke, he became startled and walked so fast, it appeared as if he ran away. You were only the second person I saw after the sun came up. Thank you for not running away."

Jessica said no more, sat back in her chair, slowly sipping her coffee. She looked down at the cup in her hands and glanced at me, but when I didn't say anything, she remained silent. I sat back in the chair, occasionally glancing at her, not quite sure I believed any of that fable she just told me and tried to decide what to make of all this. My thoughts raced. Who the hell was this lady and why did I get in the middle of this, whatever the hell this is?

The silence between us was deafening.

After quite some time, I took the last drink of my coffee, gathered my thoughts, cleared my throat and looked across at Jessica. She nervously smiled back. I raised my hands in the air, palms up.

"So, what happens now?"

"I don't know. I really don't know." Jessica bowed her head.

"Why not just go back to that place you said you came out of?"

"You saw it." Jessica shook her head. "That store has obviously been closed for a long time. I tried the door right after. The handle rusted and surely not used in a very long time. You could see the dust everywhere."

I pointed at her. "But, you were in there, right?"

"Yes. I remember I ran through, but once I stopped outside, the door stood closed, like it was never open and I could not get back in. The handle stuck and the door apparently locked. I then realized I stood in a

pile of debris, as if I was never inside. I know it sounds impossible, but it really happened."

"The door closed? You mean to say the door to that shop open?"

"It must have been, I came out that door, I swear, but now it looks like it has been closed forever. Maybe I'm mistaken. I just don't know anymore. I swear I came through that door."

"Yeah, that place has been closed a long time."

"Now what to do? What can I do? Oh God? What will happen to me? Oh God."

I looked at her long and hard, decided I had enough, took a deep breath and spoke just above a whisper.

"Listen, I want to believe you, but the tale you told, I mean, c'mon, that place has been closed forever. No way you could have been in there. So, tell me the truth now. Did your boyfriend, or husband, just drop you off there and leave? Maybe you guys had a fight or an argument and he told you to get out, or you chose to get out and he just drove off leaving you there. Maybe why you're well dressed, all things considered, but have no money, purse or wallet. Is that what really happened. It's okay, really. I'll help you either way. Give you a lift back to your home. Or pay for a cab. Or an Uber to take you home. But, please stop with the BS and level with me. Please."

Jessica sat there in what can only be described as a state of shock staring back at me. The tears began to roll down her cheeks. She held fast to her coffee cup and made no attempt to wipe her eyes. I spoke even quieter.

"I'm sorry if I sound blunt. I truly am. But, I have to know if you just created some fairy tale to cover up what really happened. Well, to be honest, your story is so beyond the pale. Seriously, I just don't know what more to say. Please help me out here."

Jessica sighed deeply, almost in a panic. "Everything I told you was the truth. If you can't or won't help me, I understand. Thank you for your time. And the coffee." She held her cup in the air. "Sorry to have bothered you. I'll leave you alone now."

Jessica stood up to leave. I motioned for her to sit back down. She hesitated, looking hard at me. I said please, and motioned again. She finally sat back down and brushed at her tears, staring me down.

"I'm sorry. Truly I am. I did not mean to accuse you of anything. First, you said you were from the future, now you are suggesting you are from 1924. I mean really? What the hell? As you can imagine, I'm having a hard time believing any of your narrative. I meant no disrespect. Really, I'm very sorry. I just need some clarification is all. Something."

She gave a last sobbing heave. "Of course." Brushed her tears away. "This whole encounter must be pretty bizarre for you. Some woman standing in the doorway of a closed up shop asking for help with what can only be described as a fantastical story." She paused to look up at me. "But, I assure you all true. How could I ever make up such a story? I really came through that store. Just look at how I am dressed. I must have been somewhere else before. Just look at me. I know it happened. Unfortunately, it happened to me."

I let out a small laugh, shook my head, smiled back at her and sighed heavily.

"Yeah, that is an astonishing point. Why are you wearing those clothes and dressed like you are? Sure dose ask the question, why? And again, thanks for the intimate details, by the way."

"Exactly. Maybe now you will hopefully believe me. I did not knowingly choose to wear clothes from 1924, intimate details and all."

She sat back, with her arms folded across her chest. Her smug look said it all. Maybe, somehow, there is some validity to what she said. Maybe I could give her the benefit of the doubt at the moment. Maybe. I pointed at her and spoke softer.

"Let's say you are right about the clothes. Maybe your story has some truth to it. Suppose I do go along for now. So, tell me, what time did you come through, or whatever you said? Maybe if we go back at the same time tonight? Maybe you can, you know."

"You mean, you will help me? Really? Thank you so much."

"Hold on. I'll try. But, help you do what exactly?" I raised my hand in the air. "First, let's figure this out. What time?"

"What time?"

"Yes. What time did you come through the store?"

"Come through? I don't know. Late. Maybe sometime around midnight. Maybe later. Maybe earlier. I just don't know."

I leaned forward and spoke softly.

"This may sound strange, but how about you come back to my condo? You can rest there for awhile. Later on we can go back to that closed up store around eleven o'clock tonight and hopefully the door will open again? That sound okay to you? Surely, we can't sit here all day. We have like 12 hours or more before tonight. What do you say?"

Jessica looked up at me, she held onto her coffee cup even though it had been empty for quite some time now.

"More coffee?"

She shook her head. "No. Thank you for the offer, but I can't impose anymore. You have been so kind to me. I couldn't. Shouldn't. Burden you anymore. Besides, and please don't take this wrong, but I don't think going to your condo is such a good idea. Why, we just met and well, I don't think it would be appropriate for either of us. You don't know anything about me and I certainly don't you."

I nodded and looked at her with a big smile.

"Well, I know you are the girl from '24, maybe from the future as well, but most importantly, you are here now and appear to be in some kind of a jam, and at the moment with somewhere around 12 plus hours before you may have a chance to fix it, whatever it is, assuming you can. Again, should I believe any of your story. So, assuming I do believe some or any of it and I am still willing to help, I think that puts me in a position of trust, which includes bringing you back to my condo. Now, for me, I live in a one bedroom condo, heavily mortgaged. I have around \$1,500 in my checking, no saving. I currently work from home in a consulting capacity, nothing remarkable, but it pays the bills. Any other questions you might have?"

"Thanks, but I'll just hang around here for now, later I'll walk back and wait in the door way like last night. I think it best."

"Nonsense. How much money do you have? Id? Wallet?"

"No. I. No, none of those things. I"

"Enough said, let's go."

"I don't know."

"Alright then, I'll sit here with you all day if I have to, but I'm not leaving you alone. It's here or my condo for the next 12 hours. Your choice."

Jessica looked around, then at me. "You're serious?"

"If you want my help."

Without another word between us, Jessica rose up, followed me out of the coffee place and walked silently next to me, as we made our way to my condo. She followed me in and stood there as I closed the door.

"Listen, unless you need to go first, I need to use the bathroom. Will you excuse me? Please make yourself at home."

When I returned she was sitting on the sofa with her dress pulled up to her waist and in the process of removing her stockings. Shoes already off.

"Hey. Hold on there. What the hell are you doing?"

Jessica stopped, one stocking off and the other half way down.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I just needed to get those shoes and stockings off for a bit. They were killing me. Do you mind, really?"

"But, your dress."

She looked down, then smiled.

"Sorry, just easier to get to the stockings this way. As you can see, those short white silk bloomers are as big as a pair of shorts. I'd ask if I could take this dress off for a bit, but I fear I may have already crossed a line. If I offended you or caused you any discomfort, I humbly apologize. I'm not trying to be suggestive of anything, but you must understand I have had these clothes on for some time and I am merely seeking some relief. Dose the sight of woman's underwear cause you a problem?"

"What? No. I mean. Oh, what the hell. Sure. Why not. Make yourself as comfortable as you need. Okay by me. Whatever will help you relax right now is what is most important. Feel free to do what you need to do."

"You mean it?"

I waved. She promptly pulled her dress over her head and laid it across a chair. She had been right, between the camisole and those "shorts" she was more dressed than some of the girls I see walking on the street. She slipped back into the cushion, almost provocatively. I quietly smiled and I must admit, thoroughly enjoyed the view of those intimates she described. Not every day I have an attractive woman in that state of dress, actually undress sunk into my sofa.

A moment later, I went into the kitchen area to kill some time. Washed a few dishes. Wiped down the counters and generally tidied up the area. When I looked around to check on her I saw she had fallen asleep in that position. I removed a throw blanket from the back of the sofa to cover her. A little over four hours later she woke up. I could see she took a minute to focus first where she was and secondly, why.

"Guess I fell asleep. So sorry, I didn't mean to be so rude. How long have I been out?"

"About four hours, give or take."

"Four hours? Sorry, I didn't mean to be so inconsiderate. Here you are hosting me and I very rudely fall asleep on you."

"No problem. I assume you have been up most of the night. A little sleep might do you some good."

"Yes I have. Thanks for the blanket." She folded it up. "May I impose even more?"

I looked over at her. She seemed to hesitate before asking. I motioned for her to continue.

"I sure would like to freshen up a bit, maybe even take a shower, if that would be okay with you? God, what you must think of me. Here I am, making myself at home sitting here in my underwear, now asking to freshen up and shower. I may have overstepped already. I have taken over your Saturday and it looks like I will do so long into the night. How can I ever thank you enough? I mean, I obviously have nothing to offer you."

I looked at her sitting there in the camisole and "shorts" and yes, she has taken over my Saturday and yes, looks like my Saturday night as well. Who is this woman really, and why have I taken her in? She stood up and I got a better look at her figure in the underwear. Not much left to the imagination. I shook my head to clear my thoughts. I found

myself enjoying her company as much as I tried to help her through this. Again, whatever the hell this is.

"Right. Okay. Not necessary. I will admit I am a bit intrigued with your situation. Actually, your chronicle of events and certainly what may happen later tonight. Not sure how much I believe or will ever believe, but at the moment, here we are. Well, let's leave it at that."

She stood waiting.

"Sure, help yourself to a shower. Towels are in the cabinet. I don't use any fancy soaps, just regular bar soap. If you prefer I can get you a fresh bar."

"Not necessary. Whatever you have will be just fine. Now, if you'll excuse me."

I watched her retrieve her dress, the other articles from the floor and walk toward the bedroom, but she turned back to offer a smile, and a wave, before closing the bedroom door. A short time later she reappeared fully dressed again and looked quite reinvigorated.

"Thank you. A hot shower sure refreshing. I truly appreciate accommodating me. My God, what you must think of me. I mean, I just made myself at home here. You have been so accepting of me, for that I am grateful."

"Looks like my condo is working out better than sitting in a coffee shop all day and night. You seemed to have settled in quite nicely."

She sheepishly smiled, fidgeted a bit and finally looked at me.

"Joe, yes I have. You were right. Your condo has been a great relief to me. I do feel relaxed and I do feel comfortable here. thank you for insisting."

"Jessica, we need to go out to get some dinner. Unfortunately, I don't have much here. I had a box dinner set for tonight. Anyway we should go out to get dinner now and I thought we could park outside that shop around eleven to watch what happens."

"I should say not. I can't ask you to buy me dinner. I mean you have done so much already. Go ahead and eat your dinner I'll be fine."

"Nope, doesn't work that way. We are going out to dinner, relax a little, maybe have a glass of wine, or are you a beer lady? Either way, we

need to take a moment to recharge. Besides, we still have several hours. Do you need a jacket or something, I might have something that fits."

We stopped in a cafe for a casual dinner, one that did serve wine and beer at night. Jessica wore one of my sport coats over the dress, she said to keep her warm, but we both knew the real reason why. When she mentioned she was from California, I informed her, tonight she was in Chicago, which brought a moment of panic, before we both had a good laugh, although hers was a bit strained.

Jessica recapped her story once again over a glass of wine. Specifically, the fact about: "not suppose to return until January 1, 2025," and how this screw up might alter that possibility and she couldn't imagine what would happen next. She looked at me her face all scrunched up.

"If this is September 2024 and I didn't cross until January 1, 2025, then where am I? I mean what the hell did I do. Why am I in Chicago? How do I go back to California? Oh my god, what did I do? How will? How can I fix this. Oh my god? I'm not even in the right place, let alone the right time. Oh God. Oh god."

"Hold on. Maybe that shop will be open again tonight and you can just go back. Christ, what am I saying. Maybe you can go back this time and then come back when you are supposed too. I have no idea what the hell I just said, and frankly I don't want to know. Let's just hope that shop is open later tonight."

Jessica sat there nodding. suddenly she grabbed her glass of wine and chugged it down.

"Another?"

She looked at her empty glass for a moment, but shook her head.

After dinner we went back to the condo for a couple of hours. Once again, she removed her shoes and stockings and once again gave me a view of those short white silk bloomers. I must admit I did enjoy the view. She closed her eyes for a bit back against the sofa cushion. A little after 10, she asked to use the bathroom and came out a short time later looking refreshed and ready to go. At 10:30 she seemed quite anxious, so I suggested we leave now.

The underground garage held my car and when we arrived there she appeared to hesitate a moment. I asked if she was okay. She took a breath, nodded and climbed in when I opened her door. At this time of

night, on a Saturday I actually parked right across the street from the closed up shop. We sat silent for the first half hour, with her focus intently concentrated on the shop. Finally, she sighed deeply and spoke.

"Do you really think this will work?"

"I'm not sure of anything, not even your story, but we have to try what we know. I'm prepared to sit here all night if necessary."

Shortly after midnight she grabbed my arm with such force, she spooked me and pointed out my window. The shop door stood open, with a little sign out front, which spooked me as much as she did. I could not have imagined that door ever be open again. I took a moment to react. Anxiously, she climbed out of the car on my side with me.

We crossed the street, her arm tucked into mine, stopping when we reached the door. I looked at her. She took a deep breath, nodded okay and went inside. I followed right behind.

"There you are Missy. Where the hell have you been? Who do you think you are pulling a stunt like that. Why I ought to. Who the hell is this? Who are you?" The old Gypsy woman was breathing fire.

"Joe," I said matter-of-factly.

"Well Joey, get the hell out of here, this is none of your business."

"The name is Joe."

"Get out."

"Wait!" Jessica yelled as she came running up to me. She kissed me hard on the lips, her arm wrapped tightly around my neck. "Thank you." She leaned in to kiss me again, softer, tender, with emotion, her lips slightly open.

"Get out."

I looked at her a moment, but thought better than to tangle with the old Gypsy woman and quickly stepped outside, but the door stayed open and I stood off to the side. The old Gypsy woman continued to breathe fire.

"Well Missy, just who the hell do you think you are to do a fool stunt like that?"

"I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to cause any trouble."

"Trouble? You caused a damn sight more than trouble. Do you realize, you are currently in a parallel life for God's sake? Oh hell, never mind. Listen here Missy, if I had my way you wouldn't get this chance to go back and reset. Personally, I'd let you rot here. Hell, I don't know what would have happened to you and frankly, I don't give a damn. You did this to yourself. Why I."

I could hear Jessica crying inside, saying sorry over and over again. Finally, the gypsy woman appeared to calm down.

"Who's the guy?"

"The guy?"

"The one who followed you in here? Did you tell him anything?"

"Tell him? No. I only. No not really. I don't know anything."

"Did you or didn't you?"

"No."

"You better not have. Oh hell, what does it matter. He won't believe you anyway."

I perked up upon hearing the old Gypsy woman say that line. What wouldn't I believe? Jessica's story, or what was about to happen? The old Gypsy appeared to sigh deeply before continuing.

"You are already in deep enough. I was told to fix this and get on with it. But, I have to know why? Why did you do this?"

"I don't know. I vaguely remember some kind of argument, saw the door open and ran in that's all I remember."

"Ran in? Listen here little Missy. You ran right through. No one's ever done that before. You might notice you are in those clothes. No transfer, no adjustment. If I had my way. Oh hell, never mind. You are here now and I have been instructed to clean this up."

The old Gypsy woman spoke softer.

"Come here. Closer. Stop crying. Fix your face. Take a breath. Here's what you're gonna do. When you leave here, tell him you had an

emergency. You had to use the lavatory. It was an emergency. Men don't understand women problems and quite frankly they don't care. Just tell him. You had an emergency and had to use the lavatory. Do I make myself clear? Do. You. Understand?"

"Yes. Yes I do."

The old Gypsy woman spoke softer. "Now go."

"Go?"

"Yes, go now. This should reset okay. A minor adjustment is all."

"But?"

"GO!"

In the next moment I realized the door I had never expected to ever see open again now closed and the debris back in the door way. I tried to look in the window, but could not see anything. I slowly crossed the street back to my car and climbed inside. The time showed half past midnight. I sat there for the next hour, waiting just in case, but nothing else happened. Exhausted, I started the car, drove back into the garage, parked and went upstairs.

Inside the right side kitchen cabinet I found the bottle of Vodka, poured two fingers into a glass added some ice and sat on the sofa. I remember finishing the drink and sitting back into the cushion. When I awoke the light shone through the window. Morning already. I slowly made my way into the bedroom only then noticing the door still closed. Once I opened the door I saw the surprise on my pillow. A woman's pair of short white silk bloomers. They brought a smile to my face. Maybe all this was real. Maybe she was real. Maybe this really did happen. Then again, maybe not. Maybe this whole incident never existed. Maybe.

The note tucked underneath:

Joe, how can I ever thank you.
You have been so sweet and kind to me.
I promise to make it up to you someday.
I left these for you to remember me by.

Jessica

I sat on the bed and read the note again. I looked at the bloomers on my pillow and picked them up. They were soft and silky, just like she said. After a moment, I folded the "shorts" up and placed them in a dresser bottom drawer. The note I threw on the top and closed the drawer.

The next three months I tried not to think of her, but once or twice, I tried to reconcile my involvement. Could I believe any of her narrative? One minute she is from the future, the next moment, 100 years ago. How could either of those exist? But, the closed up shop, I did see open with my own eyes. I surely did and I heard the conversation. What happened in there? She went in. I saw that. But did not come out. I saw that too. Did she really go back to 1924, or was it some sort of gag and I was the patsy? Compellingly, I did overhear the heated conversation between Jessica and the old Gypsy woman. Again, what did that prove? Could that have been a gag too? Oh hell, what did it matter. She is gone, probably for good. I must admit, I do miss her. Too bad she had been caught up in something and had to leave, or whatever. But, it sure was fun having her around for the day, not to mention how great she looked, dressed and well, undressed. It sure brought a smile to my face. And, I do have those white short silk bloomers. So, some crazy woman left me her underwear, whatever the hell that suggests.

October and November sort of flew by. I somehow managed to put the incident behind me. Although, the first couple of visits to the coffee shop brought a smile to my face. The weather in Mid-December prevented me from going anywhere, but it sounded like my parents weren't that anxious to see me anyway. Something about a Christmas getaway with the Nelsons or was it the Nielsen's. Christmas alone this year would be just fine with me. New Year's Eve 2024, I spent with a few friends at a small intimate party and was home by 1:00am. I did come by that shop New Year's Day and hung around for about an hour across the street. Don't know what I expected to happen. Of course, nothing did.

On Saturday, January 4, 2025, I walked down to the local coffee shop as usual. I passed that closed up shop, stopped for a moment and looked into the door way. The debris still gathered there, swirled around by the wind. No, that door hasn't been opened in forever. I tried to convince myself it never happened. I smiled for no particular reason and continued on. Retrieving my coffee and breakfast sandwich from the barista, I walked over to the condiment set up to add cream.

"Joe."

I turned to look and saw a rather attractive woman, who I didn't quite recognize, but smiled anyway. I continued to add the cream and attempted to step away, but she stood in my path.

"Joe, it's me, Jessica. You probably don't recognize me like this. Perhaps I should put my 1924 ensemble back on. Well, some of it anyway, because I believe you have the missing piece."

The hair on the back of my neck stood up. Had I not had a good grip on the coffee cup I may have dropped it. The sandwich slightly crunched in my hand.

"Wow! The girl from '24. Is it really you?. So, how did it go?"

"I truly don't know."

"Of course, how foolish of me to ask."

"Joe, please don't be angry. I really don't know."

"Sorry, didn't mean to snap. Hello, Jessica."

"Perhaps, we could sit down. I believe we have lots to talk about."

I nodded and followed her to a table. She sat across from me, again holding her coffee with two hands. I recognized the smile right away.

"You know, I had a real hard time believing your narrative. I still do. I saw you go in the store, the forever closed up store. In fact, I went in there with you until the old broad told me to get out."

"You mean the old Gypsy woman?"

"Sure. Her. I stood just outside the door and heard her chastise you for doing what you did, whatever you did."

"Joe, I assure you."

"Let me finish. Suddenly the door closed, debris all around, the shop dark. And you didn't come back out. So, the only conclusion, you were gone forever. I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

Jessica reached over and put her hand on mine. I looked down at it and she slowly removed it.

"I sat outside in my car for another hour or so and when you still didn't come out, I finally left. I want to believe all this happened, but I'm sure you can appreciate my hesitation. I surely don't know what happened in there, only that you were gone."

"Joe, I'm here now. Doesn't that mean something. I can't explain all that happened, but it did. Let me make it up to you somehow. I don't know or remember, maybe I'm not supposed to remember, but I do remember going in there and then I don't. Whatever happened in there fixed what I screwed up, because next thing I remember is New Year's Day standing in front of the Gypsy woman waiting for Bryan to come through.

I rubbed my hand across my face, took a deep breath and nodded.

"Okay, let's leave it at that. I am glad you are here."

"Glad to be here as well, one thing I neglected to ask you the last time, no doubt too occupied with my own problem to ask or even notice, so I will now. Do you currently have a girlfriend?"

I shook my head. "Boy, you get right down to it."

"Yes, but I no longer have a boyfriend either, Not that I ever did. He chose not to come back. I waited over an hour on this side, but he never came through. I must admit I felt quite relieved."

"Relieved?"

"Yes, apparently he preferred to stay in 1924, which meant I would never see him again. The Gypsy woman said we had the one chance to come back. He chose not too. So, why don't you have a girlfriend? Boyfriend, maybe? Okay if you do."

I smiled as I shook my head again.

"No, nothing like that. Had a girl over the summer. She moved away to pursue her masters. We drifted apart. No big deal. We weren't that close. Nice while it lasted, but nothing permanent."

"Sure glad I decided to come back." Her smile grew bigger.

"So Jessica, how did you know where to find me?"

"I didn't, but I remembered Chicago and this coffee place." She held up the coffee cup showing the protector with the coffee shop logo on it. "I memorized it."

"Clever. I'm impressed."

"I've been here since they opened at 7:00am. Didn't know what time you would be here. I got in last night and showed up early this morning."

I looked at my watch, a quarter of eight.

"Got in last night?' You mean from California?"

"Yes, I flew in yesterday."

"How long are you staying?"

"How long do you want me to stay?"

I smiled. "Forever."

She laughed. "Maybe, I can work something out."

We both sat quiet for a moment. I spoke first.

"Jessica, really good to see you again and I look forward to spending time with you in a less stressful situation, but I don't want to impose."

"Impose? Joe, I'm the one who imposed. Why, if you hadn't helped me out that day, I don't know what would have happened."

"Glad I could help and it appears to have worked out okay. Apparently, you did wind up back in California."

"Yes, on New Year's Day When Bryan didn't show, by the way, I had this whole speech ready to give him, but when he didn't show, I went back to my apartment and booked a flight to Chicago. At present, I fly back Monday, but I'm open to options."

"Let's see how things go. Please continue."

"Alright. I've been outside since 6:30am I had to stop by that closed up shop where you found me. I'm sure you understand. Shall we go?"

"Go? Go where?"

"I thought we might go back to your condo. I want to see those, you know, the item I left with you. I want to make sure this was all real. I really have no memory of the time away. I swear to you my only memories are of New Year's Day and for some unknown reason a vivid memory of my moment here. As far as I know, only January 1, 2025 exists, but I do have this solid memory of the day together, just me and you and how wonderful it was." She reached across the table and placed her hand on mine. "I've thought a lot about you and desperately wanted to come see you again. You were so kind to me and so understanding. You have a kind heart and incredible patience, especially with me. You certainly took quite a leap of faith to put up with me that day. My God, the story I must have told you. Well, I certainly can never repay you for your kindness. But, I had to come see you, tell you how much I do appreciate all you did for me. I hope you don't mind. So, what say we go back to your condo?"

"You sure about this?"

"More than you can imagine."

We walked back to my condo. She followed me into the bedroom. I retrieved the "shorts" from the dresser bottom drawer and handed them to her.

"They are real. I couldn't be sure. Why did you keep them. Never mind, I think I know. Can we really say for certain these are from 1924. I mean, how could they not be? I had these on when we met as you well know." She looked up at me.

"Yes I did, but I saw you go in. I saw you didn't come out. So, I had to assume you went back. That is, if I believed any of your story."

She stretched the bloomers out in front of me. "I thought we already settled all that."

I put my hands in the air in a surrender mode.

"Joe." She lowered the bloomers and held them close to her chest. "I wish I could be more detailed for you, but I honestly believe the details are purposefully vague so we don't remember. I know what I, what we, did on New Year's Day 2025. Bryan and I made the decision to go back to 1924. That much I do know. I also know I came back to 2025 and Bryan didn't. How or why I showed on that September day in 2024 is very much a mystery to me. Apparently, some event caused me to run into an open

store with a Gypsy woman inside. But, it appears instead of running in, I ran through sometime after midnight. Maybe, something else was supposed to happen and I got in the middle of it. No matter, the fact remains I ran through and wound up stuck outside, at least until you showed up. Maybe that is why it happened, so I could meet you." She fluttered her eyes and smiled. "Fortunately, I was able to reset, as the old Gypsy woman said or whatever happened and complete my time in 1924, eventually returning on January 1, 2025, like nothing ever happened. Those are the details, and the only details, I know. So, if you still don't believe my story, yarn, fable, tale, BS, or any other word you'd like to insert, just believe this. I'm here now, the time is current, not 1924, not 2024, but January 4, 2025, real-time, right now, in the present, and I'm not going anywhere, Joe, unless you tell me to leave, I'm not going anywhere.

She reached up, put her arms around my neck and kissed me. The second kiss involved tongues and passion.

"I said I surrender."

"Damn right you do, Joe."

We took a seat on the sofa next to each other. She continued to hold those white short silk bloomers.

"So, what do we tell people when they ask how we met?"

We both had a good laugh.

I looked over at her. She smiled mischievously back at me.

"Joe, I'd be happy to model these again for you. As I seem to remember, you don't have an aversion to woman's underwear. Of course, I'd have to remove everything else to be authentic to the time. Would you like to see these on me? I did promise to make it up to you sometime for all you did for me. Maybe this would do it for you, unless you would rather not."

"Might be interesting to see what they do look like on you again, but not necessary. I mean you don't owe me anything, just glad I could help. Besides, I've already seen them on you."

Jessica put her finger across my lips.

"Hold that thought. I'll be right back."

I watched her walk into the bedroom. She left the door open this time. I could hear her moving around in there. Finally, she stood in the doorway dressed in a camisole and the white short silk bloomers.

"I picked up this camisole to complete the outfit you so admired."

I smiled back at her. "Pretty impressive."

Jessica came over to the sofa and sat down next to me. I focused on the white short silk bloomers longer than I should have. She turned to face me.

"I seem to remember you appeared quite fascinated the last time I sat here like this. I got the impression you might have been interested in something more." She Paused. "You know, that was pretty forward of me to strip down like that. Not completely sure why I did. The shoes and stockings I can understand, but flashing my underwear, and then removing my dress. Honestly, I don't remember why I was so cavalier. Although, the camisole and bloomers are akin to a t-shirt and boxers, certainly not as provocative as a bra and panties. Just saying. Anyway, what you must have thought of me back then. I'm truly sorry if I made you uncomfortable. I mean really, what you must have thought."

"Jessica, I must admit I thought and still think you are quite attractive and dressed like that, more specifically not dressed as the case may be. Well, truth be told, I did find you quite attractive back then, especially when I saw you removing your stockings and your dress hiked up. I wasn't sure what to think. However, it did appear you were merely getting comfortable and it probably best you removed your dress since you did fall asleep. No question I did enjoy the view you gave me, but, well, let's just say I was both, more than interested and I will say afraid of what would come next."

She turned further to face me and I noticed her breasts were quite visible through the camisole, obviously not the same material as before. I tried not to be so obvious. She noticed and smiled back extending her chest out, pushing her breasts against the material.

"Sorry. The only camisole I could find on short notice. I wanted to recreate the scene for you." She raised her arms in the air. "I did have the impression last time I was here you might be interested more than you let on. Well, here I am now."

She lowered her arms and raised her hand in the air.

"Sorry. That came out differently than I meant. Joe, the attraction is mutual. I came here because I very much wanted to see you again. I know I owe you big time, but this is more than that. I'll buy you dinner at a fancy restaurant of your choosing, or whatever you deem appropriate to pay you back for all you did for me, so please don't misunderstand my intentions. But, if you are interested in pursuing us further, I'm all in."

I felt myself take a breath and just nodded. She sat back into the cushion, with the short white silk bloomers grabbing my attention. She noticed and gave me a big smile.

"Joe, would you like the bloomers back now. After all, they are yours. I'd be happy to let you have them back. Just go ahead and take them off me."

I smiled back at her, leaned back into the sofa cushion fully appreciating her offer. The camisole flat against her skin left little to the imagination and the white of the bloomers contrasted nicely against her tanned legs. Even more attractive than I remembered or could have imagined. Whatever happened that day that brought us together and whatever narrative she told me, whether I believed any of it or not, the day was wonderful. When she disappeared in that shop I really did miss her and truly wondered if I would ever see her again.

"Joe, what are you thinking?"

"Nothing really, just rehashing things."

"Joe, please tell me. I'd really like to know."

I looked at her, she smiled back, motioned for me to talk.

"I was thinking the girl from '24, I mean the girl here now, sitting on my sofa dressed like before. Can it really be true? I mean, you are sitting there and you are here now. No story, no situation to deal with, no tension. Just you and me. I mean, I appreciated your analysis of the past and I do accept your explanation. I'm perfectly willing to move on and."

"C'mon Joe, not at all what you are thinking about. Your thoughts are focused on the girl here right now in her underwear by choice and whether you should make the next move. Here, let me help you out with that decision." Jessica pulled the camisole over her head and tossed it aside, she then lowered those bloomers down and off.

"Now what are you thinking about the girl from '24, Joe?"