

## THE IMMORTAL ACTUARY

by

*Friday, December 13, 2165*

Stacy Kunz hated the subway—a terrible juxtaposition of clean modernism and filthy dilapidation. She hated the LED lights that filled the walls and ceilings of the car, running ads nonstop. The city was quick to fix even a single diode that burned out, but yet slow to fix any of the crumbling infrastructure the cars ran on. At any turn on the centuries-old tracks, it seemed the train could tip over or fall off its rails.

And then there were the people themselves—all broken. The world was broken. The modernist look promised a bright future, that everything would be all right, but it was all a lie. What was there to look forward to? Resources were running dry. Everything was becoming more and more expensive. World population was declining, and sicknesses ran rampant.

If anything, the past proved that no one could rely on technology. A. I. turned out to be nothing. Forget the singularity; it never happened. Neural networks were cool and could outperform humans on specific tasks, but never delivered what really mattered. They certainly didn't stop humans from destroying themselves slowly.

*At least I have a job.* Stacy held on to the top rail as she stood inside the crowded car. She was a student actuary at Manhattan Mutual. *My job sucks, but I'm surviving.* Her only hope was to work her way to the top, else she'd be on the streets.

Her thick coat was still zipped up, as she wasn't yet warmed up from the bitter cold. This time of year the homeless would ride the trains just to stay warm, which added to the crowding.

At the next stop, a seat opened up just in front of her. It usually happened around the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> stop with 90% certainty. She took the seat, and tried to relax. That was when her neck tics would come out more, which usually inspired the people on either side to shift slightly away from her. That response was closer to a 99% certainty, but she couldn't help it. She never knew when the next tic would come, so she didn't know how to stop them. And forget seeing a doctor. She couldn't afford it.

She wasn't exactly the prettiest girl around—extra skinny—long face with awkward angles. 24 years old was a perfect age for dating men, but no one ever looked at her. The certainty of finding a rich man to rescue her from the cesspool? About 1%, if not lower.

*Why would I want to get married, anyway? Look at us—not a single smile in here. We're all losers.*

The man sitting next to her stunk as if he'd never seen a shower, his thick coat seeming to accentuate his smell. *67% chance he gets off at the next stop.* Sure enough, when the train stopped, he got off and exited. An older lady claimed the empty seat.

*What happened to us? Aren't we humans beings supposed to be intelligent? Can't we do better than this? I could figure it out. I could bring back happiness to the world. But nobody wants to do it, and I'm no one to do anything about it. The rich are happy where*

*they are. The politicians only pretend to care. Nobody's going to change anything. We're all trapped.*

At the next stop, a man caught her attention. As soon as he entered the cabin, he moved gracefully around the others who were hurrying to get on, get off, or to make room for others. Just as he passed Stacy, he made eye contact for a brief instant. A really handsome guy in his mid-twenties—buff in just the right places—perfect blonde hair—full yellow beard. Everything about him was perfect. He seemed distracted for only a fraction of a second and then he continued his dance through the people. No one else seemed to notice he was there at all. Toward the end of the car, an old man suddenly got up from his seat, and the handsome man gracefully moved around him to claim the newly open spot.

*And no one else saw it? He went straight to that seat as if he knew it was going to be open. What luck!*

The handsome man pulled out his e-paper and examined current events. And he was smiling! So much confidence and happiness. How could people miss this guy who stuck out like a bright red flower in a field of yellow grass?

*Is he rich? Why is he taking the train? Wait ... there's something else. I've seen him before. Someone famous?*

*Last week—the video. It was training material for Exam #7b. Same face. Same movements. The same way of stroking his beard with his hand. Really smart guy. A great teacher who knew the material well. Maybe that's why no one else notices him. They're not actuaries.*

Stacy stood up and approached. *What do I have to lose? I could tell him how much I loved the video.* Behind her, someone immediately grabbed her seat. *Come on, neck tics. Stay away. Just give me a couple of minutes. What's his name again?*

Standing right in front of him, she said, “Andy?”

He looked up slowly, eyes full of surprise. After five long seconds he said, “Um, are you talking to me? What did you call me?”

“Sorry,” she said. “Anthony. I meant ‘Anthony.’ I didn’t mean any disrespect. Featherfield? Featherstone? That’s it—right? Featherstone?”

After another few seconds with a look of confusion, he said, “Sorry. The name is Brett Miles.”

“Are you an actuary?” she asked.

“What’s an actuary?”

Now Stacy felt stupid. Her neck tics were in full force, and she had no idea what to say next. *He's weirded out. 80% chance he'll get off at the next stop.*

Sometimes, she hated being right. When the train stopped, he got up. “Excuse me. This is my stop.” *One of the most dangerous parts of town. He's just going to get on another train. Should I go after him?*

He moved past her and got off without looking back. *No. Let him be. I've done enough.* She took his spot and looked around. *At least no one is paying attention. Small miracle in this wonderful world. Why do I even try? What did I think was going to happen? Why would a handsome guy like that fall for a small ugly girl with neck tics?*

The rest of the way to work, she kept to herself, more than usual. *Don't engage other people—it never turns out the way you expect.*

She entered her work building, went past security, and then went to the 16<sup>th</sup> floor. As usual, hardly anyone noticed her walking to her desk. All but Bob. For some unknown reason, he seemed to like her. “Hi,” he said. Always nice and friendly, Stacy would love it if only he weren’t 42 years old. “Rough morning?”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” she said. “Made a complete fool out of myself.”

“Want me to get you some coffee?”

“Sure. Knock yourself out.” Anything to get him to go away. She had to find that video and compare the instructor to the man she had just accosted. It only took her a minute to find it. *The resemblance is uncanny. 90% certain it's the same person. Anthony Featherstone, teacher extraordinaire!*

Yet, the video looked old. She checked the date. *2015? 150 years ago? Maybe a descendant?*

“Are you watching that video again?”

Stacy nearly jumped from her seat, almost knocking the cup of coffee Bob carried. “How do you ... oh, never mind. I’m just double-checking something, and it appears I had remembered things wrongly.”

\*\*\*

*Wednesday, December 18, 2165*

The nice thing about relatives was that they were forced to acknowledge your existence. Bob may have been Stacy's only friend in the world, but she also had her nephew, Clarence, who was only 6 years old. He had no qualms about her neck tics or her pointy nose, and was happy with her simply because she played with him.

She also cared for him greatly, especially with the fact that her brother had a 60% chance of losing his job in the next few months, and if that were to occur, what would happen to Clarence?

She had to get him a nice Christmas present and help him to enjoy life for as long as he could.

*What should I get him? Where can I get him something special?*

She then noticed a shop across the street she had never seen before. A knick-knack shop called The Twentieth Century in a tiny nook between two large buildings. *How long has that been there, and less than a block from work?*

She had to check it out.

The lighting inside was dark. There were no LED lights along any of the walls. A musty smell permeated the tiny nook store, though it was nice and warm. She recognized some of the characters from TV and vintage movies. *Star Wars* paraphernalia and other figurines. One stuffed animal looked like a brown dog with an aardvark nose. She picked up a 3x3x3 color puzzle and turned a few sides, wondering how long it would take her to solve it. There was also a lamp featuring an immersed blob of mystery material.

*Could Clarence enjoy one of these museum items?*

She picked up what looked like a cell phone in old movies, though it wasn't working. A wrinkled old cashier stared at his only customer.

*Why did I come in here? This place feels so ... dead.*

Behind her, the storefront door jingled and in walked a familiar face. *What are the chances?* "Andy?" She couldn't help herself.

The handsome blonde man looked at her with jaw opened wide.

Stacy stuttered. "I mean, ... Bart. No, ... Brett. What's your name again?"

The man asked, "Are you following me?"

"No, no. I mean ... I was here first. I can't be following you."

He walked over to the color cube puzzle, picked it up and solved it in 10 seconds flat. He then studied some of the other artifacts, ignoring her presence.

*I've done it again. What was I supposed to say? I don't know how to talk to a man. Why even try? There's nothing in this store I want.* She walked quickly toward the exit.

"No, stop," said the handsome man. "Who are you?"

She slowly turned around. "Stacy? Stacy Kunz?"

The man laughed. "It almost seems you're not sure. You're an actuary?"

"Yes. One of the best." Her attempt at humor.

"It appears that fate wants the two of us to meet. What is that thing you're doing with your neck?"

The tics only got worse when people talked about it. "Nervous tic. I can't stop. Really. Sorry. I really need to get home." She started for the door again, but he stood in her way.

"No need to apologize. I'd like you to visit me this Friday at 7PM. Meet me in the lobby of the Hathaway Building. Do you know where that is?"

"Sure." *How could I not know the tallest building in the world?*

"I'd love to cook dinner for you."

*This can't be happening! What's going on? What does he even see in me?*

"Here," he said, taking a blank card out of his shirt pocket. He wrote down the place and time and handed it to Stacy. "A reminder. I'll pick you up in the lobby. Friday at 7PM." *Such an old-fashioned gesture.*

Not knowing how to react and afraid to ruin it all, she promptly grabbed the card, said, "Thanks," and then dashed out of the store before he could stop her again.

*Friday, December 20, 2165*

“You could always skip,” Bob said at 6PM. “He might do ... things ... to you.” His face was nearly always the same, a sort of dead look accentuated by his thick and dark mustache. It matched the drab gray surroundings of their workplace. However, Stacy learned to read small variations in his countenance, and knew the current variants showed concern, though not so much because he feared she would be hurt.

“What could he do to me?” she said as she tried to put on bright red lipstick while studying her projection on a screen. “We’re just having dinner.”

“He may keep you after.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps not. We’ll see what happens.” *It wouldn’t be the worst thing in the world. He’s cute, young, and probably rich. Maybe he’ll rescue me, and then I could help my family, and then maybe I can do something about this broken world.*

*What are the chances tonight? 30%? 40%?*

“You could always eat at my place, instead. It would be safer. You never know what a stranger could do.”

“You’re so nice, but I’ve already said yes, and it would be rude for me not to show up.” She stared at her lips on the screen, using a tissue to dab at the red that had gone past the edges. *What does Brett see in me? Does he really not care about my neck tics and ugly pointed nose? Perhaps Bob is right. I can only mess up tonight, and then I’ll hate myself at the end of the day. 85% chance. I could spend the time with Bob, instead, but he’s too old for me. Nothing will ever happen between us.*

“Just be careful,” said Bob as he collected his stuff to go home. He would be going home alone like most every night, doing who knew what to pass away the hours.

After Bob left, Stacy couldn’t help crying at her desk, knowing it would mess up her already clumsy make-up job. The universe was always against her. Deep down she knew Brett was only meeting her because of the coincidence of their two meet-ups, as if he were duty-bound to honor some unwritten contract dictated by Fate.

She ultimately decided that there were only two outcomes. Either she’d hit it off with Bob immediately, or it would be a disaster. The latter would hurt, but watching her family die or become homeless would be worse. The date just had to work out. She had to give it a chance.

After a little more makeup and a little more hair shaping, it was time to leave. Her attempt at prettiness had to do for now, as it wasn’t going to get any better.

As she rode the subway, not even one person acknowledged her except to make room for her and her neck tics. Not even a courteous “You look pretty today.”

At 6:55 PM, she arrived at the Hathaway stop. When she emerged from the subway, she looked up at the twisted glass behemoth that took up the whole block. The Hathaway building rose to a record 3,500 feet. Standing this close, it took up most of her view, and she couldn’t see the famous spiraling antenna on top.

Most buildings this close to the subway had entrances underground, but not this building. The owner had refused to connect, wanting everyone to see and feel the structure every time they entered it. Before today, Stacy had never been inside.

It wasn’t hard to miss the lobby. Several doors along the entire west side opened into it. The lobby had a ceiling two stories high, and it was nearly as busy as Grand Central Station. She wondered how she would find Brett, but she didn’t have to worry long. He ran up to her and tapped her on the shoulder. Turning around, she saw him in a dashing expensive black three-piece suit. She was tempted to immediately engage in a hug so that she could lose herself in his handsomeness, but instead held out her hand and said, “It’s good to see you, Brett.” He smiled somewhat awkwardly as they shook hands. Suddenly Stacy was mortified that she was so relatively underdressed. *Already, this isn’t going well.*

“I worried you might not come. Glad you arrived. Come on. Let’s go upstairs.”

As she followed, she studied the people around her. Unlike in the subway, these people looked alive, happy, and filled with purpose. They were all rich, and many of them paid attention to her, but not with kind looks. *They probably think I’m a prostitute. An ugly one with neck tics.*

She didn’t think too well of them, either. Rich people were few in the world, and a large chunk of them were here. *When rich people surround themselves with rich people, it becomes much easier to forget those who don’t have money.*

Several people entered the elevator, and Brett pushed the top button. Floor #75. This was an express elevator

that went to Floor #50 before making stops. After stopping on several floors, the whole trip up lasted about five minutes. Only three others got off with them.

As the others went to the next bank of elevators, Brett said, "Let's give them a few minutes. Check this out." He took her to an observation deck overlooking the Empire State Building. Just a bit past halfway up the Hathaway Building, they were already higher than all the other buildings. From so high up, the world looked beautiful—majestic and advanced. Stacy could see why rich people seemed so distant from the rest of the world. Up here, there *were* no problems. What was everyone complaining about? Why couldn't people learn to enjoy this wonderful world?

"Okay," said Brett. "Are you getting hungry? Let's go."

She followed him to the other bank of elevators, and no one else was around. When he pushed the one button to call the elevator, it opened instantly—all empty. They entered the car and the doors shut. The buttons went up to 130, the top floor.

"Watch this," said Brett. He typed in a code on a manual key pad—more than twenty digits, and then all the button lights went dim. A new secret button appeared with the number 131 lit, and then the car went nonstop to the top.

"This is where I live," Brett said as the doors opened.

Stacy gasped. The whole floor—no, floors, were his "apartment"? It was all dark with ambient lighting—dark because a massive sheet of glass made for the walls around the entire outside of the building. Each floor was circular, with the radius shrinking in the upper floors. There were three main floors connected with an intricate system of stairs going every which way, like an Escher drawing. There was a small indoor glass-bottomed pool on the second floor, a couple of bowling lanes on the first floor, and also an entertainment section arranged like an old-fashioned theater off to their right. Living amenities appeared to be mainly on the third floor. And it smelled like an upscale restaurant—garlic and toasted bread, and ... vinegar?

"Let me show you around," he said. The short tour further included a VR hologram room with all the latest upgrades, stuff she had only heard of before. There was also an arcade section, modeled after the historical arcades from the 1980s. That section had many items she recognized from the knick-knack shop. "This is one of my favorite items, here." He handed her a gem-encrusted replica of the 3x3x3 cube color puzzle. Rubies for red, diamonds for white, emeralds for green, and so on.

On the third floor, Stacy realized that the clear glass extended over the whole roof as well. There was nothing but stars above them. "Where's the antenna?" she asked.

"You're looking at it. It's all glass—entirely opaque from the outside, and entirely transparent from the inside."

She could almost make out the twisting shape in the glass. Off to their left was a bed set, not separated from the rest of the floor. "You sleep under the stars?" she asked.

"It's so relaxing," he said. "Come over here; I want to show you something else." He led her to the only door in the glass itself, leading out to a section of roof.

As they stepped out, the wind blew fiercely and bitterly cold. It was hard to breathe. He closed the door behind them so she could see the opaqueness from the outside—a relative ugliness. She chuckled. *I am the ugly outside looking in, and he is the handsome inside looking out.*

There was little railing at all to stop someone from falling, and when she looked down, the whole world flipped. Everything was down. So far down! She could feel herself falling, though she knew full well she was still standing on the rooftop. They were so close to the edge, and just one strong gust would ...

"No!" she screamed, and then she sobbed. "It's too much. I'm going to die if we don't go back inside."

Brett put his arm around her shoulder and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know you had a fear of heights. Let's go eat."

He led her back inside and as soon as the door shut behind them and the sound of the wind ceased, Stacy calmed down. *I shouldn't have come. I'm not making the best impression. I don't belong up here. Chances of the night being short: 90%.*

As they walked past the kitchen, Stacy saw that Brett had worked hard on the dinner. Bowls, pots, knives, and flour made a large part of the mess. Something was in the oven as well. The smells that had permeated the entire

apartment were strongest here.

The dining area was small. The table was round and only big enough for two. “Go ahead and sit down,” said Brett. “I’ll be right back.”

As she sat next to the window, she had a great view of the city below and the stars above. The moon was rising—a mostly full bright orange ball that appeared as a large light from the top of a building.

Brett returned with soup—a creamy tomato paste with garlic and seasoning. It was the best soup she had ever tasted. “I hope you don’t mind,” said Brett. “I decided to go with Italian tonight.” After soup came tiny half biscuits topped with prosciutto. It was turning out to be a perfect night that would never repeat itself.

Next came a salad with small chunks of salmon. She was certain there were ingredients she had never before tasted. After that was a meaty lasagna and rolls. Brett also poured a red wine, something she loved but could never afford.

“I’m impressed,” said Stacy. “How do you do all this? The food is perfect. This place is perfect. You must be the richest person in New York.”

“Possibly.” Brett sounded as if trying to be modest.

“How did you score the top of the Hathaway Building? I can’t even imagine how much you paid for this.”

“Well, how much do you know about Mr. Hathaway?”

Stacy thought for a moment. “Not much, actually. He built this building ... 70 years ago? He was very rich, but no one knew what he looked like or how he got rich.”

“Yes, he shielded himself from the public, but I knew him.”

Stacy did some quick math. “Wait, you met him? That’s impossible. He’s been dead for decades.”

“Are you certain? Have you seen an obituary?”

Stacy laughed. “Let me guess. *You’re* Hathaway. Is that your big secret? Still alive after all these years?”

Brett did nothing but stare.

“Seriously?” said Stacy. “No way.” She dropped her utensils and nearly stood up. “Wait, ... there’s more. You *are* Anthony Featherstone. Aren’t you? I knew it!”

After another few seconds of silence, he said, “Now you can see why I’ve invited you up here. You are the first person in the entire world to recognize me in over 100 years. You’re more than I expected, very smart, possibly the smartest I’ve ever met. You can call me Andy.”

“But how? You must be 200 years old, and you look no older than 25. How did you do this?” And the chances of it being a short night dropped like a feather in a vacuum.

“I’ve never told anyone, but I’ll tell you. Just remember to keep eating. There’s still dessert.”

Stacy picked up her utensils, and Andy said, “At any given moment, there are an infinite number of parallel universes. In aggregate they cover every possibility. For example, you’re about to take a bite of lasagna, or you could die of a sudden brain embolism, or, get this, you could spontaneously transport to anywhere in the universe. No matter how crazy the event, there’s a universe out there that contains it. However, they’re governed by probability. You’re going to eat lasagna in 99% of those universes. And dying of an embolism? I don’t know ... maybe 10 to the negative 24th percent?”

Stacy answered with a full mouth. “Sounds like the ultimate Monte Carlo simulation.”

“Exactly, but only one of these universes survives to the next moment. All the rest are shadows of what could have been. And time is nothing but the successive unfolding of all these moments.”

“Okay?”

“These shadow universes exist in very tiny spatial dimensions. We can’t see them, but I know they exist. At any given moment, only one universe can survive in the larger three dimensions that we live in.”

Stacy said, “This sounds like a mixture of string theory and quantum mechanics. How can you know that these tiny dimensions exist?”

“It hit me one day. You see, as a young actuary I had this terrible habit of calculating the probability of events everywhere I went. Then one day when I was thinking about a difficult Monte Carlo simulation at work, and when I happened to catch a lecture on quantum mechanics, I discovered how the universe really worked. Did you know that our brains operate in the tiny dimensions? That’s why we could never build true artificial intelligence.

We still don't know how to access the tiny dimensions mechanically, but our brains do it naturally without us even realizing."

"Interesting ..."

"That means that our brains can access all of the shadow universes. We can sense the whole probability distribution, and when we make decisions, we're actually helping to choose which universe survives to reality. It's the aggregate thoughts of the entire world that shapes our corner of the universe! Some of us are better at it than others, but we all do it. The vast majority of people can only sense the larger view of the distributions, and make educated guesses at what comes next, and thus make decisions from imperfect information, but I've come to learn that you can increase the resolution. When you have more perfect information, you can make infinitely better decisions."

"Wait. So, basically you can see what will happen before you make decisions?"

"Sort of," said Andy. "I can feel feedback on every possible decision I can make, and then I pick the decision that maximizes my survival and enjoyment of life. Once the decision is made, it locks in the universe to my favor. The fact that I'm standing here before you today speaks for itself—it's all real."

"In other words, you've willed yourself to stay alive this long?"

"So to speak. Think about it. Life tables show that when you live longer, your total life expectancy increases. At any given moment, there's a non-zero chance I make it to the next moment, and I simply choose one of those universes, and that increases the number of 'surviving' universes for the next moment. It was difficult at first, but now it's like second nature. And it's not just survival, but also picking stocks, knowing the fastest way to get somewhere, and even picking up girls. I always know what to say. It's helped me to become the richest man in the world."

"This is hard to believe," said Stacy. "What about telomeres? No one has successfully grown them back."

"Then I'm the first. My telomeres have regenerated."

"But how? This could help so many people."

"That's just it," said Andy. "I don't know exactly. It just happens. I pick the universes, but I don't know *how* they work."

"And why are you telling me all this?"

"You're different. I like to keep myself hidden, as exposure reduces my probability of survival. That's why I go out of my way to avoid anyone who would recognize me as Andy Featherstone. When I'm riding the subway and I get a feeling to avoid a particular car, I wait till the next one. When I have people come up here to repair or deliver something, I know exactly what to say to help them forget this place ever existed. I know how to walk around people without them noticing me."

Realization hit Stacy. "But in my case, it didn't work."

"I don't understand why, but somehow you cloud my vision of the universes. You're like a black hole I can't resolve. Maybe you're particularly smart, and you're starting to catch on as well. You're already increasing your resolution of the universes."

"What? Me? That's ridiculous. Sure, I play the probability games, but what actuary doesn't? And besides, if I'm already doing it, why does my life still suck?"

Andy said, "I'm not sure if you've noticed, but over the past ten minutes, you haven't had a single neck tic."

He was right. Now that she was more aware, she could see when the next tic was coming, and could catch it before it happened. "No way," she said. "I really *am* doing it? But how?"

"I can help you refine your talent. It took me years to learn everything. I never thought I'd see another person just like me. Just think—we could be immortal together."

"I imagine being immortal can get quite lonely," said Stacy.

"You have no idea."

"But why me?" said Stacy. "I'm not pretty. Wouldn't you be better off training some other cute actuary?"

"You're not ugly. Just unhealthy, but once you get the hang of it, you'll be healthy and sexy in no time. I'll show you how it works. I already love the fact that I have no idea what you're going to say next."

Stacy frowned slightly. "This sounds amazing, but once I become immortal like you, what happens next? I

move in with you and we chill out in luxury for centuries? And will I have to keep myself hidden like you? I'm not sure I could enjoy that while watching the rest of the world fall apart."

"We'd survive together."

"What about my family?"

Andy said, "They'll die, too, eventually. I still miss my family. That never goes away. But just imagine. If the world destroys itself, and we live on, we could have our own children and train them to be immortal, too. We could evolve into something greater and more resilient."

Stacy couldn't imagine a world where she could let her friends and family die off. Not little Clarence, and not even Bob at work. She said, "Or we could help the existing world to be better. We could develop technologies from what we learn from these powers."

"Won't work. If we expose ourselves, the experiments the scientists perform would shorten our lifespans. I was like you once, when I first got these powers. I tried to find a path to help others, but each path led to my ultimate death. It was a paradox I couldn't resolve."

"I'm sure if we put our heads together, we could work something out. I'd be willing to try. Somebody has to do something out there."

"Perhaps," he said with a sigh. "Hey, are you ready for dessert? We can brainstorm further after we finish eating."

"Sure."

Andy came back with two pieces of cheesecake covered in strawberry syrup. Just like all the other food, it looked and smelled marvelous. Stacy cut off a piece with her fork, smeared it in the strawberry sauce and lifted it to her mouth. Suddenly all the universes screamed. 99% of death within the next 60 seconds. *What? Why the sense of danger?* Overwhelmed by the moment, she placed the piece back on the plate and the sensation went away. *Great. Now I'm becoming overly sensitive. It's just in my head.* She raised the piece to her mouth again, and again the universes screamed. Then she noticed Andy had yet to touch his dessert.

*Poisoned? He's poisoned the dessert? He wants to kill me? Seriously? What do I do? What's the way out of this?* She quickly considered her options. Could the universes help her? One path seemed to give her a longer lifespan. She placed the fork back on the plate and said, "I'm so sorry. I think I'm about to throw up. Could I use your restroom?"

Andy paused.

*Of course. Think! I'm an unknown variable. I threaten his immortality. If he can't see what I'm going to do, ... he's afraid I might kill him? He's not happy that I'm not playing along?*

"Sure," said Andy. "It's the door to the left behind me."

*He knows that I've figured it out. He's not done with me, but I must let this play out. It's my best chance of survival.* She walked toward the door behind Andy, but then turned suddenly for the stairs. She ran as fast as she could. Twenty seconds later she was on the first floor about to touch the button to call the elevator. However, she knew she wasn't safe yet. *99% chance of death.*

Andy came from above, landing between her and the elevator. He steadily held a gun at her and laughed. "It's good that I know how to jump three stories and land safely. You're not going to win this. I have decades of experience."

"You don't have to kill me. We can work together on this. I know we can figure something out."

"And risk throwing this all away?"

"I don't get you. If I said the wrong things, you'd kill me, but if I said the right things, you'd marry me? That's just sick. You're a creep." That seemed to drastically increase her paths to death.

"Now that I know people like you exist, I can find someone else who's willing to live out my vision. You're just not worth it." He pulled the trigger, and the time for talk had come to an end.

Stacy had no hope of dodging the bullet. *Chance of death 99.99999%. Game over ... unless ...* She only needed to find one universe, and there it was. In an instant, she found herself behind Andy. She had teleported! The bullet continued on, where it would soon ricochet off of the thick window wall and strike a white baby grand piano. Andy had not yet realized what had happened, but in another couple of seconds he'd sense her behind him and figure it out quickly. *Still 99+% chance of death.* Once he realized teleportation was an option, he'd do it himself in

a few seconds, and she'd have no hope of stopping him.

*Scenario 1: death by bullet. Scenario 2: I'm falling off the building. Scenario 3: he opens the elevator door and pushes me down the shaft. Scenario 4: again with the bullet. There's no way out! Once he turns around and sees me standing here, I'm dead. Unless ... I need a knife.*

And with nothing but a thought, a knife that had been sitting on his kitchen counter suddenly appeared in her hand, and she stabbed him repeatedly in the back.

"What?" Andy said as he collapsed to the floor. "How?"

Stacy turned him over on his back, and then the full realization of what she had done hit. "I'm so sorry! I'm so sorry! I thought you were going to kill me. I could see all the universes, and you weren't going to stop." She sobbed and dropped the knife, looking at her hands soaked in blood, and the blood pouring out from under Andy.

"No, *I'm sorry*," he said hoarsely. "You're destroying our only chance of survival. Why couldn't you just listen to me? Perhaps it's not too late."

She continued sobbing until it hit her again. *99+% chance of death in the next 20 seconds. Seriously?*

"Stop it!" she yelled while standing up. "You're looking for a universe where you can heal yourself. Look at what you've become. 200 years old, and your life has become meaningless. You've been given a great gift, and you've used it to leech off of the rest of the world? You're worse than everyone. Instead of avoiding the problems of the world, you've actually *become* the problem. Sure, no one remembers you, and no one has any idea how much you've helped their lives to suck."

Andy did nothing but stare innocently back up at her. *Still 99+% chance of death.* He no longer looked handsome.

And so it was decided. Andy's cells spontaneously dispersed.

"Impossible. How?" were his last words. Within seconds, his body and clothes had completely disappeared. She knew it would be years if not decades before someone would find this place—perhaps when the light at the top of the antenna would need repair. And if no one remembered him, who would know he was gone?

It had to be done. It was self-defense, and he was unable to listen to *her* vision. If she kept him alive, he would just fight for an eternity until one of them died. It was better this way, as now she saw the perfect future for the world—so much happiness and healthy people.

The knife ... it had to go. Its molecules dispersed. And all that blood everywhere? It had to go, and just like that, it was gone. And finally, the sense of danger had left.

What came next would take years, and she would need help. Bob would be perfect. And she could save her family.

As Stacy entered the elevator to leave Andy's apartment forever, she said, "Let's go save the world." It had no idea what was coming.