

THE QUESTION

DO SOME THINGS JUST HAPPEN?

NAIRB'S STORIES BOOK ONE

GREG SIOFER

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THE QUESTION

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THANK YOU

I would like to thank my loving parents, Tadeusz
and Urszula Siofer and my lovely daughter
Isabella Siofer.

CHAPTER 1: THE START

A loud honking sound wakes me up, and my eyes widen. Glancing at the clock, which reads seven in the morning, I realize I forgot to set my alarm last night for six. In the driveway, I see my coworker Jerry honking. I have been carpooling with him for three years since he drives safely, and it saves us gas money. He seemed better than the other option, the bus, as he also works at Home Projects with me as the chief designer, which is mighty convenient. I swing quickly around the bed to grab my socks, pants, and shirt from the floor. Dashing to the kitchen, I almost slipped on the new hardwood floor. I grabbed a cup from the wooden table that had leftover coffee from yesterday; I took a sip, staining my shirt as I drank too quickly. I don't have time to change. I hurry back to the bedroom and kiss my three-month pregnant wife, Grace,

on the forehead while she's still sleeping like I do every morning.

Putting on my white shoes, standing on one foot at a time, I rush to the front door, disregarding my untied laces as I go. As soon as I open the wooden entrance, the sun reflecting from Jerry's sports car blinds me for a second. I close and lock the door, then dash towards the vehicle, tripping over my shoelaces and landing on my knees and palms. After I get up, I notice a circular rip in my pants around my knee, but I have no time to worry about it, so I simply wipe my hands against my legs. Next, my attention is drawn to the car's back wheels being more prominent than its front ones. When I draw closer, I notice the vehicle is bright yellow, a different color than the past, and it reflects light easily. My eyes squint more and more with every step I take.

As I enter the car, Jerry compliments me on my early readiness and the fall, but I'm not in the mood for his sarcasm.

"I'm sorry I'm late," I said breathlessly for air.

I sit down in the passenger seat and tie my laces. While closing the door, I ask, "Major car changes?"

"No, I just made some modifications," he says, glancing at my shabby outfit.

The tires squeal on the pavement as we back out of the driveway, and then forward at full

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throttle. Suddenly I feel hot. My heart pounds against my chest, and my eyes widen.

“What are you doing?” I ask in a nervous, crackling voice.

“Calm down, Nairb. We are running late, so I must make up the time,” he replies, looking at me, then back at the road. He pushes the gas pedal down to the floor, and the speedometer needle rises quickly.

“Slow down!” I yell.

“We don’t have time to slow down,” he screams back.

Swerving left, he avoids the cars parked on the street. My eyes float out of my head as I look at the cars hurtling down the main road. As he flicks on his turn signal, Jerry increases his speed instead of slowing down.

“It’s the main road up ahead,” I said with wide eyes.

“I know,” he says with his white knuckles gripping the steering wheel.

My sweating increases at Jerry’s response. The car screeches as he turns the wheel ninety degrees to the right and onto the main road. My body shudders back down in the seat when he speeds up again. Unable to raise myself, I remain silent and pray for this torture to be over. I’m thrown around like a rag doll as he swerves left and right, passing the cars on the highway. He makes the same sharp turn ten minutes later when we approach our work parking lot. After,

the car finally stopped in an open spot with the knob in the park position. I open and close the door, then bolt towards the entrance of the building.

“Are you not interested in seeing the engine, Nairb?” Jerry calls me.

I shoot him a stern glance and quickly approach the main door. Running inside, I said hello to the secretary. Before I can go up the stairs, my boss Bonnie appears.

ARRIVING AT WORK

“Nairb, why are you sweating, and why do you have a hole in your pants?” Bonnie asks.

“I’m sorry I’m late. I don’t know how to answer that question without sounding ridiculous. I tripped and fell,” I said, looking at the rip, then back at her.

“Have you been hurt?”

“Nothing to worry about. Thanks for asking, though.”

“Not a problem, Nairb. Just take care of yourself.”

It was a very awkward conversation. I slowly climb the stairs, holding onto the handrail. When I reach the top, I swing the door open and walk towards my cubicle.

Stef, my coworker, is reaching for something at the printer. I don’t want to be reminded of my tardiness again, so I move behind her unnoticed,

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and reach my desk. I sit down in a grey office chair with five wheels at the bottom. My seat tips over when I land in it too hard, and I fall with it. As soon as I get up, I sit back down on it as if nothing happened, looking around to see if anyone saw my embarrassment. As I turn on the newly installed computer, I see smoke appear from the back.

To be on the safe side, I quickly disconnect the power cable. After placing the computer on my desk, I take out a screwdriver from a drawer in my cabinet. The tip was incorrect, so I headed to the storage room to find a suitable one.

My face feels hot as I make my way to the end of the hallway, hoping no one will notice me. The air feels dry as I enter the storage room that has no windows. I noticed there are a few boxes I will have to stack to reach the drawer where the tools are, so I grab one and place it in the corner. As I put the second box on top of the other, I grab the third one, and halfway through, it catches fire. I scream and drop the box. My coworker Arthur springs to my aid. We suddenly get drenched when the sprinkler turns on, along with the fire alarm in the storage room.

“What happened?” he asks, looking red and gasping for air.

“I don’t know,” I respond with a confused look.

Bonnie quickly appears in a panic. “What did you do to my boxes?”

"They just went up in flames, and now we're soaked," I reply.

"I have spare shirts in my office if you need them," she sighs, looking at the both of us bewildered.

Arthur and I followed cautiously into her office.

"Don't worry about the storage room or the alarm; it will be taken care of; just go back to your work. I need to figure out how this happened and I'm here if you need anything."

We go to the restroom and change our shirts, then head back to our cubicles.

As I sit in my chair looking at the new but broken computer on my desk, I am a bit mystified. A few minutes later, I picked up the phone and called the IT department to explain the problem. They say they will bring another computer and hook it up in thirty minutes. As I put the receiver down, I look at the clock on the white wall. I look at the long hand, and if I'm not mistaken, it seems to move ahead more quickly than usual. I suddenly become entranced by its movement and find myself deep in thought.



"This was a great idea, Nairb. No one has ever asked me to build a snowman before." Grace turns to look at me as we roll the large snowball together with our hands.

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"I'm glad you like this," I said, staring back briefly.

Grace squats down and grabs snow with her hands, then gets up and throws it at me. I turn my head and see her smiling.

"Are you there, Nairb?" The IT person asks.
"Nairb?"

"I'm sorry, my mind wandered off," I said, looking up in response. "I just called you, did I not?"

"Yes, about thirty minutes ago. I'm Joe, your IT. Greg is away, so I'm filling in."

I pause for a second, unsure of what to say. "Here it is," I said, pointing to the computer.

"Please give me a few minutes to look."

A few minutes later, the computer is repaired and connected to a new monitor, and Joe says, "Here you go."

As I lean back in my chair again, looking at the clock, wishing it was three-thirty p.m., at the end of the workday, the long black pointer moves faster and faster, going around and around until it stops at three-thirty. While I try to think about what just happened, Jerry shows up, asking me if I am ready to go.

Puzzled, I quickly try to collect myself, so as not to draw attention to anything.

"Um, yes," I said, looking at him. I get up from my seat, and we leave.

We walk down the hallway, into the lobby, and finally, outside. As I am walking, I glue my eyes to the sidewalk along the path leading to the parking lot, and I see a coin on the ground. I reach down to pick it up. I hold it in my right hand, opening my palm. The coin turns red when I look at it, and it feels hot.

I drop it, yelling, "OW!" I lift my hand, looking at it, confused.

Jerry turns around. "Are you okay?"

With a confused look on my face, I said that I was.

We continued walking to his vehicle. Despite my shock, we drove off smoothly. I'm still confused about why he drove so radically that morning.

"Jerry, what happened this morning?" I ask gently.

"I just wanted to test my car, plus I forgot my medicine."

"Medicine?" I asked in a surprised voice.

"Yes, to keep me calm."

Jerry is unaware of what happened to me earlier, and I stay silent.

My red brick house can be seen as soon as you turn off the highway. It is not fancy, just a standard home, split with two windows in the front. After we pull into my driveway slowly, I open the car door and get out, squinting my eyes. I see Grace out front, sitting on a bench.

THE TALK

Walking towards my wife, I ask, "How was your day?"

"It was good. And how about yours?" She responds, her eyes following my movement as I approach.

"Well, I have some things to tell you."

We kiss each other on the cheek as we approach the side door of the house.

Jerry slowly drives away, yelling, "Don't forget to pick me up on Monday!" Through the window.

As we walk inside, I look at Grace and tell her to sit down. She lowers herself onto the leather couch, and I sit right beside her, turning to face her, and grabbing her hands. I look into her eyes, and then begin.

She listens as I tell her about the new computer and the smoking monitor, the strange fire in the storage room, and the time changes on the clock, as well as the heating of the coin. For a few moments, she doesn't speak.

"Sure," Grace finally says, rolling her eyes. "Nairb, are you feeling well?" As she pats my arm.

"Grace, I'm serious. These things really happened."

"Sure, Nairb, I believe you," Grace says, getting up from the couch.

"I'm serious," I repeat in a raised voice.

“Fine, wait here.”

She stands, then strolls upstairs. I hear her rummaging around in a drawer in the bedroom as I wander to the kitchen to get a glass of water. I make my way back to the couch.

Grace bounds down the stairs, comes and sits beside me, and then grabs my hand.

She looks into my eyes and says, “Open your right hand.”

I do as she asks.

“Okay, Nairb, here.” She places a silver necklace into my palm.

“Do what you said.” She exclaims.

“Now look at it,” she says, holding my hand.

“Nothing is happening, Grace.”

“Look at it again, but this time, imagine that it is turning red.”

I close my eyes, take a deep breath, open my eyes, and look at the silver necklace. I raise my head as I notice it reddening, casting my gaze on Grace.

“Look, it’s turning red!” she exclaims.

I grab the necklace that is continuing to redden and hold it up in front of Grace’s eyes. “I don’t feel any pain. I should feel something from the heat.”

I dropped the necklace into the glass of water that I had placed on the table just moments ago. The steam makes a low pitch noise. Like a kid getting a new toy, I jump joyfully back and forth.

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Grace simply stares at me and the glass of water a few times, saying nothing.

"You weren't joking." Grace looks at me with wide eyes.

"No, I was trying to tell you."

She gets up from the couch.

Standing in front of me, she grabs my hands, looks into my eyes, and says, "Listen, this is serious, so don't tell anyone."

I nod.

"Good. Now, can you show me more?"

"Yes."

"Alright, let's go outside."

We headed to the front yard.

"Do you see that tree at the end of the street?"

"Yes," I said.

"Think about the top branch catching on fire now?"

As instructed, I look at the tree, place my eyes on the top branch, and imagine it on fire. It bursts into flames within seconds.

"Holy, you did it."

Grace abruptly squeezes my hand. "Quick! The fire truck will be here soon, so let's get inside before anyone sees us."

We dash towards the house and go inside.

"I don't think anyone noticed us looking over at the tree," she says.

We walk to the leather couch and sit down. After a few minutes, we hear sirens coming down our street. We walk towards the window

nearest to the couch, and I lift the drapes so we can see what's happening. The tree was completely devoured by flames, and the fire truck was using the hose to douse it. I drop the drapes, and we walk back to the couch. We sit down and look at each other in silence and stare into the distance.

Grace is the first to speak. "This is crazy, Nairb. Hold on, let me go grab something," she says, standing.

As Grace strolls up the stairs, I can hear her footsteps, then the sound of a drawer opening and closing. She comes down a minute later, repositioning herself beside me on the couch.

"Did you say that the computer smoked?" She inquires.

"Yes."

"Hopefully, this old phone will puff smoke if I am right," she says, handing me her old black cell phone.

"Don't forget to think of smoke as you look at it."

I glance at the phone, but nothing happens.

As I look at her, I point out the obvious: "Nothing is happening."

"Let me turn it on first. Okay, now try."

A cloud of smoke billows from the cell phone. Grace claps and then kisses me on the cheek.

"Nairb, this is amazing," she exclaims.

"Don't tell anyone and don't take this too far."

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I nod.

"Is there a reason your pants are ripped?" Grace suddenly notices.

"It's a long story."

"Oh, I'm sorry that I forgot to tell you with all the commotion, but Jim called and invited us to go to dinner with Dawna, and I accepted. They will be here in one hour. Before we go, I think we should try the thing you told me about moving the time. What do you think?" Grace asks.

"Let's go for it."

"You should change for dinner first, though. You don't look good with that hole in your pants," she laughs.

"Sure," I reply.

A pair of blue jeans and a dress shirt are in my drawer. I slip on the area mat in front of the dresser. I throw my pants and shirt up in the air and fall back on the bed.

As I take off my shirt, I am surprised to find a strange scar about half a foot long on the right side of my chest.

"Come quickly, Grace," I shouted.

She dashes into our bedroom. "What's happening?"

"Look here," I point to the scar with my index finger.

"It doesn't look fresh. It looks like it was from a cut a long time ago," she says, sitting beside me, and looking at it closely.

"Does it hurt?" she asks, touching it with her finger.

"No," I confess.

"Don't worry about it right now. Just put on your shirt."

Grace grabs my hands and gazes into my eyes. "Now look at the clock and wish it is four-thirty like you did at work."

I do as Grace requests. The longer hand starts rapidly moving, landing on six after going around in a circle. Suddenly, we heard the doorbell ring, and we turned to each other.

"Wow," Grace exclaims.

CHAPTER 2: THE RESTAURANT

We went downstairs and opened the door to find my friend Jim.

“Ready to leave?” He asks.

Grace and I look at one another.

“Yes, just give us two minutes,” I said, closing the door.

“Oh my God, Nairb!” she exclaims.

“It’s crazy, right?”

We grab our jackets and put on our shoes, then lock the door behind us.

As soon as we are outside, Grace says, “Remember, not a word.”

We walk down the driveway to Jim’s blue Honda sedan, then climb in the back on the passenger side. The two of us greet his wife, who is sitting in the front passenger seat. Jim inserts the key into the slot and turns it. It sounds like the car wants to start, but it doesn’t. Despite his re-

peated attempts, the engine doesn't start. Turning the key again, his face reddens.

"Give it a minute," he says, turning it once more.

The car finally comes to life, but I can smell smoke. I turn my head to the left and look out the back open window.

I see a puff of smoke. "Is it okay to drive with this happening?" I ask, turning my head and pointing to the wisps in the air.

"Yes, it does that sometimes," Jim answers, flushed all over from the ordeal.

"Oh, okay," I reply.

As we finally drove away from the house, I heard a strange noise in the vehicle.

"Do you hear that?" I ask.

"I do, but don't worry about it. That occasionally occurs too," Jim says in a high-pitched voice than usual.

I look at Grace. "Uh, okay," I said again, rolling my eyes.

A green sports car slowly passes us to the right.

"Look, look," Jim says, pointing at someone showing their bum against the window.

I turn to Grace, whispering, "Watch this."

I focus on the bum hair visible on the right cheek, and it ignites, causing a small fire on the hair. He sits instantly, and all we can see are hands appearing and disappearing. Looking at Grace, I smile big, raising my eyebrows, then

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turn my head back to the middle as if nothing happened.

“Did you see the big flash and his bum quickly disappearing?” Jim asks. “Now all I can see are hands appearing and disappearing in the back seat.”

I almost burst into laughter.

“I wish I had a camera to capture the moment. That was so hilarious. I have seen nothing like that before, almost at the restaurant. Get ready for food and fun this Friday night,” Jim announces, glancing at us in the rearview mirror.

“I hope they have good food,” I said.

“They do. Jim brought me here before,” Dawna says, turning her head towards the back seat.

“Yes, you’ll like it.” Jim glances at me.

Jim gets off the highway, and then slowly drives into the restaurant lot.

When the car is parked, we all get out and walk to the front door.

Upon entering, I open the door for Dawna and Grace. “Ladies first.”

Jim and I follow them inside. A woman greets us and asks if we have reservations, and we say we do.

She asks for the name our booking is under, and after finding it on a list, “Jim, please follow me.”

Our group is led to a round table covered with a grey tablecloth, adorned with four square

plates and wine glasses, next to a red-brick fireplace with flames blazing.

“Your server will bring your menus soon,” the hostess says, then walks away.

Grace sits down in a chair I pulled out for her, and then I push the chair towards the table. Jim does the same for Dawna. After we are all seated and looking over the menus we are given, a person walking around the tables interrupts us, playing classical music on a violin.

I see Grace sitting at the table, and I'm looking at her as I hold a dozen roses. My hands are warm, and my undershirt is moist. I walk up to her and squat down on the floor, my right knee touching the ground, and I place the roses in front of her, swinging my right hand slowly forward from behind my back, holding a black box. I see her eyes reflect the ray of light coming from above as streaks of drops fall from them to the ground.

When I turn my head to face Grace, I lean my lips towards her ear.

“Watch this,” I whisper.

In an instant, the string attached to the violin melts as I focus my vision on it. As he's playing, the string snaps in half, but he ignores it, so I focus on two strings at once. *He can't ignore it now.* Following two of the strings on the violin

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snapping, to my surprise, he finishes the song with the two remaining ones, despite being red in the face and having wet stains on his shirt.

"I'll be back in twenty minutes," he says, walking away.

As I look at Grace, I wink and turn my head back to the menu, pretending not to be paying attention.

"Why did you do that?" Whispering, looking at me.

"I just wanted to see if I could. I'm sorry."

"No need to apologize."

"Did you see the strings pop?" Jim asks.

As I read the menu, I lied, "I didn't see it."

The server returns fifteen minutes later, and everyone orders steak and red wine. They give us our plates; she opens the wine bottle in front of us and pours the liquid into our glasses, then leaves. With our wine glasses in hand, we take a sip, put the wine glasses back on the table, and begin eating.

I feel hot, and I assume it was from the fireplace, so I ignore it. Ten minutes later, still feeling the same, I turned to Grace. "Excuse me; I need to go to the men's room."

I slowly pushed the chair away from the table and stood up. After apologizing to everyone, I walk towards the restroom sign. I swing open the door to the men's and go inside. There is a mirror on the left wall above the handwashing station. As soon as I turn on the faucet, cold water pours

out. I bend down to catch the spray with my hands. I splash the cold water on my face twice, then grab a paper towel from next to the faucet to dry off.

Feeling chills down my body, my heart is pounding against my ribs; a drop is forming under my shirt. As I close my eyes and move my head down, I splash some more water on my face. When I open my eyes, I take a deep breath and look in the mirror.

WATER

I dry my face with a paper towel again, put it in the garbage beside the door, and shut off the water.

I walk towards the door and open it as if nothing happened. When I reach the table, I sit down.

Grace says softly in my ear, "Everything okay? You've been gone for a while."

"Yes, everything is fine," I whisper back to her.

I look down at my plate like everything is normal. After taking a bite of steak, I look up and ask, "What did I miss?"

Jim meets my eyes. "Nothing exciting."

After we finish our meal, I quietly say to Grace, "I want to spice things up to make it more interesting."

I see a server holding an empty tray. I glance

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at it, and she drops it. There is a loud thud as it hits the floor. After picking the tray up and walking away, she drops it once more when I focus on it a second time. Red-faced with embarrassment, the server picks it up. Everyone in the restaurant had her attention, but I chose to stop. She picks up the metal tray and finally walks away. Grace turns her head to me, and I wink at her, making eye contact.

“Nairb.” She whispers.

“Nairb, did you see that?” Jim is looking at me.

“Good thing nothing was on that tray. It must have been slippery,” I reply with my head down.

“I agree,” Jim nods his head.

We raise our wine glasses for cheers, then sip our drinks and chat until Jim finished the bottle. When it’s time to pay, we call our server. After paying our bill, we proceed to the exit, and then walk to Jim’s car. Once we have put on our seatbelts, we begin the drive home.

“Did you like the place?” Jim asks us, looking in the rearview mirror.

We both say that we did.

When we reached our house, Grace and I went out.

“See you later, guys. Thanks for a fun evening,” Jim says.

As they back out of the driveway, Dawna, and Jim wave until we can no longer see the car

lights. We turn around to face the house and walk towards it.

Grace nudges me in the stomach with her elbow. "Look at the side window. It's open."

INTRUDER

Raising my head, I said, "You're right. Stay here, and I'll investigate."

Walking up the driveway, I quietly open the door on the left side of the house and step into the kitchen, leaving the door open wide. Keeping to the right wall, I slowly peek around. Suddenly I feel pressure on my left shoulder, as if someone wants my attention. I turned my head and saw Grace.

"What are you doing here? You are supposed to stay put!"

"I wanted to see," she whispers.

"See that knife on the counter?" I whisper back.

"Yes."

"Please get it for me, but do it quietly."

"Here it is." Grace hands me the kitchen knife.

Slowly, we slither along sideways, sticking to the wall. I hear something coming from upstairs. I turn to Grace and, with my index finger to my lips, I shush her and make gradual movements.

"Hear that?" I point to the location of the sound. "Quietly now."

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We move casually, more to the side this time.

Grace sneezes, breaking the silence. "Crap," she mutters.

"Who's there?" Grace asks.

I glance at her. "Are you serious?"

A person bolts down the stairs, pointing a black gun in our direction and holding something shiny in their other hand, yelling for us to put our hands up. With our arms raised, I draw my eyes to the gold cross necklace sticking out of their left hand, which instantly turns red, forcing the intruder to drop everything and flee out the nearest door.

I look at Grace. "Are you alright that was scary? Do you mind picking up the gun and placing it on the table next to you? I'm going to call the police." I lower my hands.

Taking a few steps forward, I hear a bang and my body pushes forward. I twist around and see Grace standing with the gun in her hand.

"Why does my shirt feel wet on the right shoulder? Did you shoot just me with the gun?" I ask in disbelief, looking at the bloodstain.

"Oh my God! I'm so sorry Nairb, it was an accident. Stay still, and I'll be right back," Grace raises her hand towards my chest as she puts the gun on the table with the other, then rushes upstairs.

The cupboards in the washroom bang loudly. A minute later, Grace races down the stairs and stops in front of me.

As I take off my shirt, I said, "I thought getting shot might be a bit more painful." I clench my teeth and widen my eyes.

I point at the bullet wound with my index finger, and Grace inspects it.

"Look, Nairb, the hole is closing, and the bullet just popped out and fell to the ground."

Grace grabs a cloth from the table next to her and licks its end. She cleans the bloodstains from my shoulder.

"How come your hand has a cut on it?" I inquired when she was finished.

"As I passed you the kitchen knife, I cut myself."

"Let me see it." I take her right hand and open it.

The wound on her palm slowly heals.

"Look, the cut is disappearing," I exclaim.

"Grab the knife from the table."

Grace does as I request, pointing to my right forearm.

"Cut me!" I told her.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes."

Grace holds the knife near my right forearm.

"Are you sure?" She looks into my eyes.

"Yes. Grace, just do it." With that, she cuts.