

## Category B

### “Nobody knows what dangers a watch can bring”

By Neha Mehta and Laiba Khan

There she was, wearing her beautiful wedding dress with details of delicately embroidered thread and red gemstones that she had planned to wear for a long time while her future boyfriend wore an elegant red suit that matched the roses she clutched in her trembling hands at the end of the small hallway dotted with rose petals. Several violins created background music that accompanied her slow and graceful steps on the way to the altar, welcoming her with enthusiastic applause from the guests. My parents sitting in the front row watched this beautiful scene with tears of joy and enthusiasm like me. There I was waiting to do one of my master pranks to make that day unforgettable for our entire family. I tried to grab Violetta's pale hand so I could help her up the altar but I never reached it. Everything seemed to move away and the images were blurred, the music transformed into a sequence of louder and louder noises. I got up abruptly in alarm to check the time on the clock on my nightstand. The darkness of my room felt overwhelmingly melancholic and the strong smell of dust (which had been piling up on the shelves for days and waiting for a thorough cleaning that would never come). Barely two days had passed since I tested positive for Covid-19 and started with the mandatory quarantine, however I could no longer endure another second in that miserable room caged like a completely alone and isolated animal, I had barely survived to the previous quarantine, it was impossible to face another without the company of my friends and roommates. The weariness of doing nothing stood there doing its duty as an undesirable intruder, and horribly excruciating pain racked my head with the intention of making it explode. I missed the soup my older sister made for me when I got sick. Surely at this moment she is stressed and angry while she takes care of the last preparations for her wedding, which because of the virus I will not be able to go. A tear of sadness slid down my cheek making me come back to reality and out of my depressing thoughts. I crawled into the bathroom leaning against the wall because I felt weak. My face was repulsive, it had a sickly pale color and huge dark circles the color of my sister's name. And my terrible emotional and physical state was clearly reflected in my gray eyes. I sighed and tried to clean myself so that I could get rid of that look of bitterness that I had been wearing since they gave me the news that ruined all my plans.

And as I showered, I couldn't stop thinking that I was really looking forward to the vaccine being found and the whole coronavirus thing to be over at once. When I finished I felt refreshed but still the constant need to sleep that existed in me did not go away. So I went back to my bedroom with the intention of collapsing on the bed when I noticed that the sheet had fallen to the floor. With all the laziness in the world I bent down to pick them up, but before sitting up I noticed a small glow under the bed. I felt an irrepressible need to pick it up and see what it was about even knowing it was probably nothing. Once incorporated and with the mysterious object in hand, I decided to analyze it: it was a small shiny white wristwatch with silver details. It looked to be expensive. I also realized that it was definitely not mine. It must have been dropped by the previous occupant of the apartment I recently occupied.

When I turned it over to see if there were any names on it, I saw a small red button that I accidentally pressed as I continued to check the accessory. Then everything went black and I began to feel myself falling into a deep well. Until, after several anguished and infinite

seconds, I felt myself colliding with the floor of the room and the colors returned. Had I suddenly fallen? Completely confused, I got up and put the watch in my pants pocket since I couldn't return it until the coronavirus was gone. It was at that moment that I heard voices on the other side of the door. Confusion seized me, I was supposed to be alone in the apartment, plus only I had the key. I walked slowly towards the door trying to make as little noise as possible. And as I gripped the cold doorknob, I realized that I could clearly hear a woman's voice saying goodbye, and the sound of a call cutting off. I partially opened the door and tried to see her. She seemed to be trying to cook but it seemed like she was frustrated by the way she scooped up the vegetables and cut them. Had she been mistaken for an apartment? No, it was impossible, he would have to have the key to enter. So I decided to go out and just when I was out of the room I realized that I could give her the virus. When she heard me, she turned around and instead of being surprised by the fact that she was pointing her kitchen knife at me, I was surprised by the fact that she had a very strange outfit. She yelled at me asking who I was. I explained the situation to her. I told her that this was my apartment, that she probably would have gotten confused. And she looked at me suspiciously and said that this was her home. I first thought he was joking, but his gaze was too serious to be a joke. So I thought she might be crazy and realized she was pointing a knife at me. So I slowly walked away from her and went back into the bedroom and closed the door as quickly as possible. Then I realized that it was not my room, nothing was as I had left it: my things were not there and the decoration was different.

I looked around completely confused since as if by magic, everything had changed. The furniture had strange shapes that I had never seen before and the color of the room from a light white was transformed to a turquoise one. The curtains were elegantly sewn and fell slightly and swayed with the wind. The rays of the sun danced in the room making disappear all the darkness that he had seen a few seconds before going out to see that woman outside.

What was happening? Was I going crazy? There was a knock through the door but I was afraid to open it.

- Hey, come on, I don't know who you are or how you managed to get into my house but you don't look like a thief so please, let's talk face to face – said the stranger on the other side of the door.
- I can't, I'm going to infect you, it's better to have distance – I hoped my voice reflected the seriousness of the situation.
- What are you talking about, what illness could you have that you fear so much?
- I have Covid-19, I tested positive a few days ago for not being careful.
- First of all my name is Kenna, call me that and secondly, the disease you are talking about was eradicated years ago. We are all immune from primary school, when they give us the vaccine as a precaution, it is impossible that this disease has not yet become extinct. – She sounded totally confused and seemed very sure of what she was saying.
- How is it possible that the vaccine was found? And you say you are immune, do you have evidence? – I said suspicious, what I was saying was completely impossible.
- First come out, I promise you that you will not infect me or I will hurt you.

Still undecided, I slowly opened the door with my hand covering my mouth. Kenna had a completely serious expression. She took a few steps towards me but I stopped her with a yell.

- Stay away from me!

- Calm down. Look, take your hand off, I already told you I'm immune. – She was beginning to sound frustrated.

She took a strange object out of her pocket and pressed a tiny button on the side. Suddenly images appeared showing news about the pandemic. Images moved with just one touch from Kenna. It was news whose headlines spoke of anniversaries of the pandemic, there were also debates about that, and many were explanations of what the coronavirus was and how it affected the world, etc. But what really struck me were the dates: they were all from the year 2200 onwards.

I was amazed at such a smart technological object.

- What's that? – I asked surprised wanting to touch the device.
- Don't you know what a zux is? Hey, where do you come from? – She looked at me completely surprised.
- I already told you that I do not understand anything of what is happening. I'm going crazy a moment ago I was in my room complying with the security protocol, keeping rest and then I find myself in this strange place full of artifacts that I have never seen before. Even your clothes look out of this world.  
Then a robotic voice inside the apartment welcomed a certain Roel who entered through the door at the end of the hall. He looked in his thirties and didn't seem surprised to see me, although he was confused.
- I'm home love, today we eat here or outside? By the way, who is he, why didn't you tell me before that he was coming and why does he have that face when he sees me? Did you see a ghost? – the last question was addressed to me.
- You're here, listen to all the crazy things he's saying. By the way, I still haven't asked your name. – She turned to me.
- My name is Jungkook but you can call me JK for short, like my friends do. – I said, still trying to process that information.
- Well JK I'll go set the table in the meantime tell my husband all the story you just released, then we'll decide what to do with you. – She said walking away towards the kitchen.

I turned red at the situation, I was not sure if I should talk to strangers who wore metallic garments that seemed not to belong to our world. And they lived in a house that seemed to have a life of its own filled with all too weird gadgets. It seemed like the whole house was a robot, I couldn't stop staring at every painting on the walls.

In almost all the paintings natural landscapes or animal drawings were shown. I didn't stop analyzing every detail as I followed Roel into what must have been a living room. But I had never seen a room like this: each piece of furniture had at least four different colors. When he saw that I was quite uncomfortable standing there in the middle of the room, he asked me to sit down. And so I did, after that I took his icy silence as an invitation to tell him my story. And surprisingly, at no point did he make fun of me. After my explanation the suffocating silence returned.

- Have you ever stopped to think what would happen if we could travel back in time? – was the only thing he asked me.

Not knowing what to answer I just shook my head, stunned. He answered me with a smile. And then a beep broke into his mysterious thoughts. He just told me it was time for dinner, so

we headed to what must have been the dining room. The table was a phosphor blue color and it barely fit one person, or so I thought until Roel pressed a button that he had not seen under the table and it folded several times on itself to become a table that could fit about six people.

The food literally fell from the sky, at some point the ceiling silently opened and each plate fell where it should be. Finally Kenna arrived and she looked questioningly at her husband and gestured to his ear. I didn't understand anything but I saw how they both touched the part behind their ears and there was a click. After that they seemed to have a mental conversation with each other. My discomfort at that time reached the moon. The food on my plate had very strange shapes but it seemed appetizing, however as soon as I tasted it I realized that it was a sweet lie: it did not have any kind of flavor. So I finished eating as quickly as possible even though I didn't touch even half of the plate. When I told the strange couple that I had finished they felt in a very strange way and I got chills. They led me into the bedroom and there Kenna began to type on the surface of what looked like a desk. Roel, who was sitting in a levitating chair, asked me to sit across from him on the bed.

- You see, I am a scientist and inventor in an agency dedicated to creating new devices that change the world. And once years ago we managed to reach our goal. We were working on the possibility of time travel. And we were able to build clocks that were capable of teleporting you to another era. But the government refused to allow it to be commercialized and took all of us, except for a package of those watches that I kept. Unfortunately, the police discovered that watches were missing and I had to send the last 5 to different times. And I think you have something that belongs to us. And in gratitude for giving it back, we will give you a dose of the coronavirus cure – and he pointed to his wife. She was opening a desk drawer where she was sitting and she showed me an injection.

But I had a feeling that something in the whole thing was wrong. So after she injected me with the supposed cure, I got up and looked at them.

- I think the Government banned those watches for something – I said and took out the one I had found and pressed the button watching as Kenna tried to pounce on me. I felt again how I fell into a well that seemed to have no end. Only he did, and after several days the doctors said that he had already overcome the coronavirus and even though he caught them, they let me go to my sister's wedding. As for the watch I ended up burning it, nobody knows what dangers a watch can bring.

THE END