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My name is **Brett Diffley**, author of **Perfect Plan**.

I hope you enjoy this valentine's story, and may each of you find that love so rare!

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**Time Traveler**... and the gift of Anna.

The man sat on the edge of his bed, hunched over, looking down at the plush grey carpet under his feet. Both sadness, and anxiety threatened to overwhelm him like a slowly constricting avalanche, crushing his chest, with little hope of recovery.

*Had he made the right decision?* He asked himself sadly, finding it even more difficult to breathe.

He was known as a *traveler*. And like generations before him, he was from a race of people with a special gift that allowed them to go back in time. But with it, came a huge responsibility and at a cost he couldn't yet fully understand. You see, the gift was great, but not limitless in its power, and only went as far as the individual's life span.

He slowly shook his head. At one time they'd numbered in the thousands, but slowly over the last 100 years all that changed. Each for various reasons had stopped traveling, and in so doing lost the gift. Now he was the last of the *time traveler* race.

*How had this happened?* He'd often wondered. But his understanding of this paradox, and also its burden, became much clearer after meeting Anna.

She was the source of his present anxiety, but also all his joy. Never before had he met such a woman. One could say, it was only because she was so beautiful—but he knew better.

He'd often wondered what it would feel like to know love—not just the word—but the concept...unbridled... passionate, and more than anything else devoted. He began to think of it as only wishful thinking, or just an illusion...like waves of heat rolling off the desert sands. But now he knew different. He'd met Anna. An incredible lady, whose slender frame held an enormous heart, and the spirited gift-of-life that blossomed each time she looked at her child. But like him, she also had one missing element that would make her life whole. She wanted to know the true meaning of love. To be loved unconditionally without any boundaries; a love for all time. So she kept that empty space in her heart available, but bridled with caution due to her own unpleasant past. This had been the learning experience of youth. She'd committed to a man...but after a short period of time she began to see through his façade; a pain that ran deep to this day.

It was because of this pain the traveler had decided to voyage back, and get a glimpse of her past...and see the very turmoil that had touched him so deeply.

So it was... two days ago he'd traveled back to see her life through her own eyes. He'd witnessed a young woman full of hope and promise, grow into a giving and intelligent woman. Watched her marry the man she thought was hers forever, become pregnant, and then give birth to an amazing child she named Maria. Life had turned into a dream...a fairytale come true. Then the relationship began to change when the blindness of her love began to fade, and with it the lessening of her heart—a place that had been reserved so faithfully for him.

She learned she'd become merely a possession—a worker to make his life better, and worse yet, without any expectation of monogamy. So with each passing day, her burden increased, and soon she was working for three. Then the turmoil reached a pinnacle, and she

found herself and her child on the street—with no money—and little hope. She was lost...nowhere to go. Life and love had come crashing down.

The man watched in both anger towards the husband, and sadness for the woman named Anna. This also became a very pivotal time for the *traveler*. And although their blossoming relationship was relatively new, it didn't change the fact...he loved her. So this love made it difficult for him, knowing the depths of her pain. But what could he do? If he was to intervene, it would change the future. That same future that had finally brought her into his life—a cherished time for the traveler. But, as with *true* love, the words '*wanting the best for that person*' held true. So with a tortured soul, and breaking heart he'd intervened. And with it came a new understanding of why his race had all but disappeared. They'd figured out, even with best intentions, the changing of the past left them with an uncertain future. Such was the case now for the *traveler*.

The adjustment he'd made had been so small, but like a domino, it had created a rift that grew in on itself. Then it only needed the nourishment of her desires and will to survive. And then she flourished.

Now he sat on the bed in his hotel room—unmoving—and uncertain. His unselfish decision had been one of love. He'd removed her pain, gone like smoke in the wind, to be replaced again with a life of wonder...just like she'd once known. But did it change *his* future with her? The question ripped at his very soul. Only *time* would tell.

Although it felt like an eternity, he didn't have to wait long.

There was a tap on the door—so unexpected—he jumped. Then his heart began to race as he opened the door. There she stood... tall and slim faced, with green eyes that left him

mesmerized like the first time he'd met her. It was Anna, the woman he'd longed for his entire life. But would she remember?

The two met each other's gaze for a moment without a word.

His knees grew weak, and he could scarcely breathe from the uncertainty.

She gave him a cautious smile and held out her hand. In it held *one half* of a pendant made from pure gold, the lower edge jagged like a piece to a puzzle. It was one half of a whole, and spooled around it lay a chain of gold.

He looked into those beautiful caring eyes, trying to understand. You see, when he'd traveled back and witnessed her grief...her pain became his. So he'd left the priceless gold pendant near her side on the snow covered curb where she sat in despair, crying—and broken—like the very pendant that could save her. It would give her options, he reasoned, and more than that...if she wanted...hope.

He'd watched her proud eyes catch the glint off the gold polished surface from the overhead street light. Hesitantly, she'd picked up the chain that held both halves. After wiping her tears on her sleeve, she'd looked at the two halves separately. Then putting them together, and staring in mild disbelief when she turned it over. There was an inscription...so tiny she had to squint to read it...

*"To my Anna. This gift is for you. May hope hold your destiny, and may one day our paths meet again."*

Confused, she looked both ways, up and down the street. Nobody was there at this hour of night, except for Maria who was fast asleep on the cold cement by her side.

Her hands began to tremble.

She read the rest of the message, and new tears flowed down her cheeks. But *these* tears were of a different nature...

*"Once you took me into a dream, and we walked together along the beach. I saw both of our footprints in the sand, they were very close to each other. As we walked, I saw all the events of my life before me, beautiful and sad. But the whole time your track remained beside me, you walked with me. Then you saw a time of grief and fear, and suddenly only one trace was to be seen. You asked aghast: "Where have you been, in the worst time of my life?" I looked into those beautiful green eyes and said: "Where you see only one set of footprints in the sand, I carried you!"*

*Love forever...without boundaries.*

*Me*

Tears welling, she stood before him now. Her golden hair cascading over her shoulders and down the front of her elegant white fur coat. His heart skipped a beat. She was, and still is the most beautiful woman he'd ever met.

She spoke softly. "It took me awhile to understand your beautiful message."

He cocked his head slightly with a hint of hope.

Smart beyond her years, there was a gleam of understanding in her eyes. "I never stopped searching. You're a *traveler* aren't you?"

The man was still speechless and nodded.

"We were to be as one once, weren't we?"

Again he nodded. His blue eyes misty.

“You loved me very much, but you were willing to let me go,” she said, holding up the pendent. “The gold from one of these could buy a very good life here in this country. But what you failed to understand when you ‘removed’ the anguish from my past...it had already been replaced by you.”

No one spoke for a moment. Then she asked, “Is it true? What you wrote I mean?”

His blue eyes now sparkled. “Every word,” he said without reservation.

She smiled, and her face turned radiant. “Then this belongs to you.” She held out the other hand, where the second half dangled from her fingers. It had been cherished, and looked as new and shiny as when he’d left it for her so many years before. “I want to know such love again.”

She stepped into his waiting arms.

\*\*\*\*\*The End\*\*\*\*\*

As for the traveler...He’d found what he was looking for, and then joined the rest of his dying race...never to go back-in-time again. He now understood...only the present mattered...and love was the greatest gift of all.

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(\*\*\*The *Footprints in the Sand* inscription was altered for the story. It’s been written in various forms by an unknown author, but some of the most beautiful words I’ve ever read\*\*\*)

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Brett Diffley

