

Jessica worked really hard to keep the conversations relevant and maintain the pace in this story. It is an interesting short story set in the future about a man who deals with dead people and makes sure that nobody gets through the system that is alive. It is a really good story that makes you think...what if?

~ Elia Olson, Tutor

“153562903”

By Jessica Hart

It was red. I blinked; keeping my eyes shut a couple seconds. What was happening had to be a dream. Once they turned blue, they never turned red. Especially after a week. It was theoretically impossible.

I opened my eyes and stared at the screen. Definitely red. I grabbed the emergency procedures binder and scanned for anything that might help. Nothing about blue dots turning red. Damn. I decided to call Mr. Wilcox, the head honcho at Life Corp.

“Hello. How can I help you?” his secretary answered in her annoying high-pitched voice.

“It’s Greg from the Deletion Department. Is Mr. Wilcox in?”

“He’s out to lunch at the moment. He’ll be back in about an hour.” There was a sharp snap on the line as if she just popped some bubble gum. It took everything I had not to scream at her.

“It’s an emergency,” I said through clenched teeth.

“He’s not here Greg, but I can leave a...”

“A blue dot just turned red.” There was a pause on the line.

“I’ll call his cell and get him over here a.s.a.p.”

“Thanks.” I put the receiver down and looked back at the computer screen. I’ve worked here from the beginning of Life Corp., and nothing like this ever happened.

Back in 2005, Life Corp. received the government’s approval to secretly inject newborn babies with microscopic tracking devices. In 2006, tracking devices were placed in every flu shot (which became mandatory that same year). Eventually, every United States citizen covertly had a tracking device injected into his or her blood stream.

When the mechanism gets into the blood stream, it becomes activated. How, I don’t exactly know. It’s top secret, and I’m only in the Deletion Department. But when the device becomes activated, it appears on the computer system as a red dot. When the person passes away, the dot deactivates, becoming a blue dot.

Over the years, thousands of people are tracked daily, but not everyone who has a device is tracked. The government uses the tracking system to watch over suspected criminals, known criminals, and people of high interest in politics, entertainment, or business.

Everyday, Tammy and Frank from the Separating Department send the Dead of the Day (D.O.D’s) down to the Deletion Department. That’s where I come in. I’m the only staff member in the department, so the D.O.D’s kind of get backed up a couple days. What can I say, a lot of people die. What I’m in charge of doing is checking to make sure of three things with each D.O.D.:

- A) Next of kin has been notified
- B) The body has been buried
- C) The dot is blue

If those three things are cleared, I delete that person’s file. The only files that we keep are those of the people that the government has tracked. Everyone else goes into the trash.

Like I said before, I’ve worked at Life Corp. for 20 years and nothing this odd ever happened. The dot I had been staring at fit two of the three D.O.D. guidelines. The only problem was the fact that it was red.

The door to my office flew open and Mr. Wilcox rushed to my side.

“Amber called me. Is it true Gregory?” The worry in his voice was evident.

“Yes Sir. This blue dot just turned red. Right before my eyes.” I pointed at the screen, and then looked over my shoulder at him. “What should we do?”

“Call the cemetery. How long has it been red?”

“Ten min...” I trailed off, realizing what I said. “Shit!” I grabbed the phone and dialed the number for Peace Cemetery in Langston, Nebraska.

“Peace Cemetery. This is Patrick.”

“This is Greg Finns from Life Corp. I need you to dig up 153562903. He’s gone red!”

“What?”

“Just do it and call me back at Life Corp. Headquarters when he’s dug up.”

“I’m all over it.” With that, Patrick hung up. I swirled in my chair to face a worried Mr. Wilcox.

“He’s taking care of it as we speak.”

Mr. Wilcox breathed a sigh of relief. “Good thing you caught it. If you hadn’t...well...the red would have gone blue...again. Good work.” He patted my shoulder and turned to leave. “When you get a call back, call for me. I’ll have the business jet ready to leave.”

After 25 minutes of watching the red dot move from his burial space to the Peace Cemetery’s main building, Patrick called.

“Alive alright. But not saying much. I think we got there in time. Should I call an ambulance?”

“No! We have to keep this under-wrap. If we get any more people involved, the whole system could get out. We don’t need any publicity, let alone bad publicity. How many know on your end?”

“Only two. Me and the digger, Sam. We’ll keep it quiet. No worries.”

“Alright Patrick. Mr. Wilcox and I are going to fly in as soon as I get off the phone with you. We should be in Nebraska in about a half hour, so just stay with him...”

“It’s not a man.”

“What?”

“It’s a little girl. Maybe five years old.”

My mouth dropped as I scanned the file. Of course! After you’ve been in this job for 30 years, the only things you really look at are the three guidelines and the ID number. If you look any deeper than that, it gets too personal and can bring you down. But this little girl was five-year-old Lily Cameron of Faith Falls, Nebraska.

“Patrick. Her name is Lily. Stay with her until we get there. We’ll be there as soon as possible.”

After Patrick agreed, I called Amber and told her to get Mr. Wilcox out to the jet. Within minutes we were leaving Life Corp. Headquarters in Indiana and heading to Nebraska.

Mr. Wilcox and I sat in silence for the first half of the trip. I just stared down through the clouds at the land below, thinking about the last hour.

How could a little girl come back to life after almost a week? Would she be able to tell us about death? Is there nothingness like everyone believes now? Did she meet up with any dead relatives? Was there a heaven?

As all these thoughts were bouncing around in my head, Mr. Wilcox was reading a newspaper. Actually, I think he was pretending to read because in that first 15 minutes, he never turned the page once. I finally decided to break the silence.

“Do you believe in God, Sir?” Slowly he brought the paper down, his head appeared over the top.

“Does anybody anymore?”

“Well, I guess since they found the bones of Nancy, no one really does.” Nancy is the name given to the missing link between humans and apes. Nancy pretty much proved that evolution was how humans came in to being. God had nothing to do with it. “Everyone pretty much jumped off the God bandwagon.”

“To be honest Gregory, I never believed in God. I was always big with science, and it never seemed plausible that a single entity could ever create life. A guy controlling the whole universe never...fit in the whole scheme of things if you know what I mean.”

“I was always one of those people who wanted to believe something that incredible, but there was never enough proof for me. Maybe today we’ll find the proof we need.”

“Don’t get your hopes up,” his wrinkled face slowly slid back behind the paper. “Nancy solved everything.”

I nodded and went back to looking out the window. If this girl had spoken to God, heck, this girl waking up after about a week is enough to rejuvenate religion and stir up an almost dead belief in God. She wouldn’t have had to talk to anyone to be classified as a miracle.

But, more than likely Mr. Wilcox would want to cover this up. Only certain people in the government, doctors, FBI, CIA, secret service, and people who deal with the dead know about Life Corp. and what they have done. If everybody knew, it could create a government crisis. Thousands of people might rise up against the government because they think everyone’s privacy was being invaded. It could bring down the whole U.S. government if the public found out prematurely. I guess revitalizing society’s belief in God would have to wait for a miracle that everyone could know about.

We touched down and hopped in a taxi. It only took 20 minutes to get to the Peace Cemetery. My heart was pounding. This was such a big story and only a couple of people in the whole world would know about the whole thing.

We paid the taxi and dashed into the main building. Mr. Wilcox ran to Patrick and Sam. I, on the other hand, went to Lily.

She was sitting on a wooden bench in the main foyer area. I was shocked at the way she looked. Actually, it wasn’t the way she looked; it was the way she didn’t look. I guess I was expecting a zombie looking girl with holes in her cheeks from decomposing and ripped up clothing. I wasn’t expecting wide blue eyes, cute blonde pigtails, or a perfectly ironed dress. She reminded me of Alice from Alice in Wonderland. She fell down that huge, dirt-filled hole, but still looked fresh faced.

Mr. Wilcox came over and looked at her as if she looked like the nasty zombie I had expected. “Your…parents are coming.” Then he walked away.

“Heartless,” I mumbled and then sat down next to her. “Hello Lily. My name is Greg. How do you feel?”

“Okay.”

“Can you tell me what happened?”

“Yeah.” I waited for her to continue. Obviously this was going to be more difficult than I thought. I had never had kids, so I had no idea how I would talk to a little five year old, let alone talk to her about her own death.

“Do you remember anything?”

“Yeah.”

She lifted her head up and looked at me. A smirk came across her face. I couldn’t help but smile back.

“Was it fun where you went?”

“The box?”

“Was that all you remember? Coming out of the box?”

“No.” She stopped kicking her feet and kept her eyes locked on mine. “There was a Big Voice.”

“Really,” my heart quickened. It could have been Sam yelling for her to hold on or Patrick yelling at Sam to dig faster, but I wanted it to be…God. “What did the Big Voice say to you?”

“I couldn’t tell when he started. I was asleep and he told me stuff.”

“What stuff?” I was getting frustrated fast.

“He said, ‘don’t be scared.’” She stopped. I kept quiet for a while. Hoping that a little break might speed up her memories. After a couple minutes of silence, I started asking questions again.

“So, do you remember your family?”

“My mommy. My daddy. My doggie Reggie.”

“Yeah. They are all on their way to see you. They missed you a lot.”

“I miss them, but the Big Voice told me I’d see them soon.”

“It did, did it?”

“And he told me I shouldn’t have been there…it was an oops. ‘A big one,’ he said to me.”

“Did you ever…see who the Big Voice was?”

“No silly,” she giggled. “You can’t see in the dark.”

“Did he say anything else?”

“He said I would be red. I told him I was white, and he laughed at me. He was nice. He told me someone would see me red and get me. Did you see me red?”

Tears came to my eyes, but I pushed them away. “Yeah, I saw you red.”

Finally Patrick, Sam, and Mr. Wilcox walked over to the bench we were sitting on.

“Well Gregory, what did you find out?” Mr. Wilcox asked while looking down at me.

“She says she is fine, and she also...talked to a Big Voice Sir.” Just as I finished saying this, they burst out laughing.

“You know perfectly well there is no God. It’s been proven wrong! They found Nancy. Heck! Even the Vatican stopped shootin’ out Popes. I swear you must be one of the last men to convert to evolution,” the digger said condescendingly.

But while the three of them were laughing at me, I just looked at Lily. She winked at me. That little girl talked to something. She was a miracle to me and just the proof I needed.

Mr. Wilcox talked to the family when they finally stopped kissing and hugging Lily. He told them that it was a mistake and that their daughter was actually only in a coma for six days, not dead. He also told them that Sam heard her screaming when he was digging. I wasn’t really mad that they didn’t know I found their daughter. I knew that Lily knew the truth and that was all that mattered.

I may be one of the last people to believe God was real, but at least I knew the truth. The rest of the world can believe that they’re the descendants of bacteria, and I’ll believe a little girl had a conversation with the big man upstairs.

As time went on, I decided to start going to church. There was only three in America, but once a month all the believers gathered at each. Luckily there was one in Kentucky. Only about twenty people showed up, but I like to think that more people than twenty believe in God.

Work died down after about a month. Amber and I were sworn to secrecy and had to sign this whole big contract about confidentiality. (Like anyone would believe me if I told them.)

I went back to deleting files, hundreds a day, and nothing like that day ever happened again.

Ever once in a while I’ll get that urge to see Lily. Ask her some more questions. Maybe see how she turned out. As the years ticked on I wanted to see if she was married, had kids, or had a successful career, but I always kept a distance. Maybe contacting her would open some wounds that took years to heal.

I knew for a fact she wasn’t dead. Since the incident, I look at the names of every D.O.D. It’s the least I can do before I delete them...forever. I also go to the Tracking Department and ask to see number 153562903. She’s always moving about, like any other red dot.

Call me crazy, but I think that her red dot shines brighter than all the other ones. Maybe not because of the whole God thing, but because she’s the only red dot I ever cared about.