

# Forever On His Mind

by Jim Schicatano

"That's it?" he asked, skeptically.

"That's it!" Dr. Vincent replied ecstatically.

The Doctor's young friend and sole household servant, Seth, eyed the time machine from a distance, visibly unimpressed by its construction. "It's awfully small. Looks kind of like a box of oatmeal."

"Of course it looks like a box of oatmeal. That's exactly what the exterior is. But inside that column of cardboard lies the mechanism through which I shall return to the past and reclaim my love, Peggy."

"Her again," Seth muttered as he shook his head. He had been quietly sweeping around the Doctor's basement lab, hoping to finish his work early and head home for the night. But Dr. Vincent, generally too engrossed in his work to notice the young man, had other plans.

"Yes! Her again!" The Doctor angrily replied. "My boy, you are obviously not familiar with matters of the heart. My entire adult life has been devoted to discovering a mechanism by which I may return to that fateful day when I left my one true love behind. It was that day when I boldly departed the town of my childhood, seeking a position of challenge, advancing monetary gains, and possibilities of personal achievements and rewards!"

"What did you say?" Seth asked in confusion.

"A time-machine, my microscopic-brained, young friend! A time machine!"

"I know that! Look, Doctor, I'm really beat and want to head home. Your dinner is ready upstairs. You better eat it now before it gets cold. If there's nothing else . . ."

"Nothing else! Seth, my boy, I am asking you to join me in my most triumphant hour. My lifelong work is complete. I have completed construction of a TIME-MACHINE! You are a fortunate young man to witness history in the making. I will go down in infamy. And you will be as famous as that assistant of Alexander Graham Bell . . . That fellow . . . That assistant of his . . . Oh what IS his name?"

"As famous as him, you say?" Seth sarcastically countered.

"Oh, never mind me. My mind isn't what it used to be." The Doctor abruptly turned away from Seth, and altered the focus of his thoughts to the distant past. His bushy, gray eyebrows were raised and his thoughtful, bloodshot eyes were twinkling. Then he reached deep into the recesses of his memory to conjure up often-reflected images from the days when he was a young man ready to confront the world.

"But in 1946 . . ."

"1946? That was fifty-nine years ago."

"Forty-nine!" the Doctor angrily corrected him. He took a deep breath in frustration and continued. "Regardless. Ah yes, back in 1946 . . . Oh what a year that was! The brutal atrocity that was World War II had finally ended. We were a victorious people, sole dominators of a war-ravaged world. And there I was, a brilliant, gay, handsome, young man whose heart was stolen by the lovely, talented, and charming Peggy McKeenan . . ."

"Sir, the word 'gay' doesn't mean what it used to . . ."

"Silence, Seth, I'm reminiscing. Ah, what a woman she was, my boy . . . What a woman! The way those dexterous fingers glided across the keys of a grand piano. The way her long, smooth, nimble legs drifted across the stage in her ballet performances . . . She could recite poetry with an emotion and heartwarming style unlike my ears had ever heard before . . . And what a beauty! Those bright, dazzling eyes, dancing in the moonlight. Her lips quivering while her arms were wrapped tightly around me. The smooth alabaster face that displayed such youthful innocence. Those lips, so full, and wanting of mine! Never did a man and woman love each other so much. Never were two people so meant for each other. My immense love for her could only be rivaled by her devoted, all-encompassing love for me!"

Seth cleared his throat and interrupted. "Now tell me again how she dumped you."

The Professor through up his arms in hopelessness. "What's the point. Trying to explain the wonders of love and romance to a Simian-minded creature like you is useless."

"Simian? What are you talking about? My father was Polish – my mother was Dutch."

"Forget them! I am attempting to describe my Peggy to you – that is, if you are capable of refraining from your all too customary interruptions."

"Doctor, I've heard this story so many times. You left town looking for a job here in the city. You got a job, found a place to live, and then headed home to propose to that one-man woman of yours. But when you got there, you found that she had run off with some C.P.A. – Hank or something."

"Frank!" the Doctor irately corrected him.

"Whatever. Since then, you've spent your entire life trying to come up with some crazy way of winning her love back. I know all this, now may I please go. I've had a rough day and I've got a date tonight."

Doctor Vincent shook his head in disbelief. It was no wonder that the working class never advanced beyond their daily struggle to survive. Where was their imagination and sense of challenge? "I am on the verge of time travel and you wish to head home. Well you may do so. Head home to that rat-hole of an apartment of yours, turn on that boob-tube, and you and your girlfriend can watch the Gilligan's Island marathon all night long if you wish. I had only asked you to experience this with me because I thought you might be interested. I see I must endeavor this alone."

"All right," Seth sighed in surrender, as he rested his broom up against the wall. "What can I do?"

The Doctor quickly returned to his reminiscing. "She was the youngest of four sisters, you know. All three of them still reside in this area. But my lovely Peggy departed this country forty years ago. My eyes have not been graced by her incomparable beauty since. But tonight I am returning to 1946 and alter the course that I had traveled."

"Look, why don't you just ask out one of her fat, spinster sisters. They probably resemble her. Then you and one of those hippos can live merrily ever after and you can forget about Peggy."

"They are not fat!" Dr. Vincent countered angrily. "They are merely full-figured. I may have mentioned the largeness of her sisters to you in the past. But I have never done so in a derogatory manner. I have conveyed to you my affection for them quite often. They comforted me when my Peggy had run off...er, departed me. And remember, young man, it is what's inside a human being that counts. I have often found that large women possess very large hearts."

"And other huge organs, too," Seth mumbled to himself.

"What's that?"

"I said I agree with you, sir." His eyes rolled in frustration. Since he was forced to remain and witness the Doctor's futile attempt at time-travel, anyway, he figured that he might as well try to have a little fun. Unfortunately, Doctor Vincent had never cultivated a sense of humor.

"That's better. But now it is time."

"You're going to turn on the box of oatmeal?"

"Time machine, my boy! It's a time-machine."

"Oh yeah. How's that little thing going to transport you back to 1946, anyway? I mean, you can't get into it."

"Ah, very astute, Seth! You see, once I turn it on, a field of Vincent Energy is created, through which one can pass through the fourth-dimension."

"Vincent Energy?" Seth grumbled warily. "You named it after yourself?"

"Who else? Anyway, I have already programmed the time machine to transport me back to a specific point in time. All I need do is throw the switch."

"Then what?"

"Then, I shall relive my entire adult life again, but this time accompanied by my beautiful wife, Peggy Vincent."

Seth suddenly reflected for a moment. "Haven't you tried this before?"

"Of course not, Seth. Don't be a fool. That must have been one of my other projects."

"Well, what's going to happen to me?"

"You shall stand back away from the box of oatmeal...I mean, time machine. I shall disappear before your eyes, the time-line will readjust itself, and then I shall reappear before you, a happily-married man."

"Good luck," Seth snickered.

"Thank you, boy, but I don't need luck. Thoughts of her have consumed my mind for what seems to be forever. But finally, I shall be reunited with the woman that I love." Dr. Vincent turned away from the young handyman and directed his attention to the machine. He began to flip switches on the top of the box.

"My quest is over. My lifelong passion has come true. This is everything I have ever dreamed of, young Seth. If I can just return myself to the point in time that I decided to leave for the city without her . . ."

A glowing, white, translucent cloud suddenly appeared, engulfing Doctor Vincent. Seth leaped backwards in fear and confusion. Within seconds the Doctor disappeared and the cloud quickly dissipated.

An uneasy sensation swept through Seth. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head, trying to regain his coherence. He stumbled backward against the cement wall as he lost his orientation. Then, quite suddenly, everything returned to normal.

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"Now what?" Seth asked Doctor Vincent.

"I make the necessary adjustments, flip the switch, and travel through time, cursing the very day that I married that evil wench of a woman. All these years of torment and misery she's put me through. It is like an affliction from the devil himself!"

"I rather like Miss Peggy, sir. She's always been kind to me."

"Yes," the Doctor snickered bitterly, as he continued to tinker with three dials on top of the box of oatmeal. "I believe it is the female Praying Mantis that is kind to her male, too – just before she bites his head off! To think, I could have been free of that infestation. If I had just left for the city on my own as planned. But no, I had to stop and marry the vermin from Hades, before we left for the city together. I'm warning you, young man, never marry. Women are evil, pure and simple."

Seth shrugged his shoulders. He never believed for an instant that Dr. Vincent could succeed in transporting himself through time. And he considered the Doctor's lifelong quest to be futile and a waste of the very time that he wished to alter. Quite suddenly, he said, chuckling, "Ya know, if this doesn't work, maybe you can try a box of INSTANT oatmeal, instead."

"I do not find your comments humorous, boy! This venture is simply too important to be demeaned by inept attempts at levity."

"Sorry," he replied in dismay, his eyes rolling in frustration.

The Doctor continued. "In a moment, I shall be rid of that walking pestilence – and that herd of buffalo she calls her sisters! I will

return to 1946 and alter my life, liberating myself from the cruel-fated bondage that is my obsession of escaping her evil clutches. And then I shall pursue the noble life of dedicated-bachelorhood and a life without the former Peggy McKeenan! It is ready. One press of a switch and my mind shall be free of her forever."

Seth suddenly reflected for a moment. "Haven't you tried this before?"

"Of course not, Seth. Don't be a fool. That must have been one of my other projects."

"My quest is over. My lifelong passion has come true. This is everything I have ever dreamed of, young Seth. If I can just return myself to the point in time that I decided to remain in town an extra day and marry Peggy, instead of leaving for the city immediately . . ."