



Eleven Minutes at 3:07 AM

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At exactly three o'clock in the morning, Mateo stepped into his dim kitchen and froze in sheer disbelief. Sitting at his table was an older man eating leftovers, bearing his exact face—graying at the temples with a distinct scar over his left eyebrow. Without looking up, the stranger pointed to a chair and commanded him to sit down, insisting they only had eleven minutes.



Mateo leaned over the counter, his heart pounding, as he noticed the stranger holding his mother's secret recipe card for arroz con pollo. Only two people in the world knew that recipe, and one of them was standing right there. When Mateo gasped out that they were the same person, the stranger calmly tapped his fork and revealed he had traveled back thirty-one years from the future.



The visitor leaned forward with intense urgency, warning Mateo that his phone would ring in precisely ten minutes at three-eighteen. It would be his estranged brother Daniel calling from a bar on Calle Duarte, sounding tired and hoping for a ride home. Mateo's stomach twisted into knots, since he and Daniel had not spoken a single word to each other in over two years.



Confused and overwhelmed, Mateo demanded to know why his future self had undertaken such a wild journey. The older man explained that in his original timeline, he had reluctantly picked Daniel up, but their bitter argument in the car led to a horrific truck collision. The older self survived the wreck, but Daniel was lost forever.



The room fell into a heavy quiet, punctuated only by the hum of the refrigerator and a distant dog barking in the alley. The older man confessed that he spent half his life building a time machine, fueled by thirty-one years of crippling guilt and the conviction that staying in bed would have kept his brother alive.



Desperate to prevent the tragedy, young Mateo pleaded with his visitor to simply tell him to ignore the ringing phone and stay home. He waited for the clear command to avoid the trip entirely, believing that staying in bed was the only way to rewrite history.



Instead of agreeing, the older self let out a tired, incredulous laugh and shook his head slowly. He explained that just before leaving the future, he discovered a forgotten letter Daniel had written decades ago, proving that the fateful phone call was actually Daniel's brave attempt to apologize and reconcile.



The older man smiled through tearing eyes as he realized that ignoring the call would mean Daniel died believing he was never forgiven. He urged Mateo to answer the call, pick up his brother, and keep his eyes glued to the road, saving the forgiveness talk until after the car was safely parked.



The edges of the older traveler began to flicker and glow like a fading candle flame as his time in the present drew to a close. With a final nod of fierce encouragement, he vanished into thin air, leaving behind only the faint warmth of the plate and the echo of his advice.



At three-eighteen on the dot, Mateo's phone illuminated the kitchen table, displaying Daniel's name on the screen. Snatching his car keys with a determined smile, Mateo answered on the second ring, ready to drive into the night and rewrite their story.