



TIME OUT

PENNY GARNSWORTHY

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‘But what happens when I ... get there?’ asked Ryan.

His father smiled. ‘I’ve been waiting for this Ryan, for so many years. I can’t believe it will finally be a reality ...,’ he trailed off, the smile lingering on his lips, his eyes glazed over in thought.

‘But what will I do there, dad?’ Ryan persisted.

Mr Taylor’s smile dissolved into the business-like manner Ryan knew. ‘That’s up to you son. According to my calculations you should arrive only seconds after you leave here.

I suggest you leave the laboratory and look around the university grounds. Make a note of the changes you see, venture out into the street, and then head for the house. Just take it all in, son.’

Mr Taylor placed his hands on his son’s shoulders. ‘It’ll be wonderful Ryan.’

Ryan could see how excited his father was. He wasn’t a man to show enthusiasm, or affection often.

But questions were niggling away in Ryan’s brain and his face was consumed in a frown.

‘But dad, what if you’re not there when I get there?’

‘It can’t happen, Ryan. We’ve been through this before. Just work out where you are. If you arrive somewhere you don’t recognise – say for instance the lab has moved, just go to the house.

‘I’ve thought it all out, believe me. Even if I wasn’t at the university anymore I’d have taken the equipment home with me. Ryan, there’s nothing to worry about.’

Ryan shook his head slowly from side to side.

‘What’s happened, son? You were so enthusiastic about the experiment. What’s changed your mind?’ his father said.

‘I guess I’m just ... well, a bit scared. What if it doesn’t work?’

Mr Taylor frowned. 'Well, if it doesn't work you won't have gone anywhere, will you?'

Ryan looked down at his feet, which he shuffled from side to side, nervously.

'You don't have to do this,' his father said, resignation in his voice. 'I can find someone else.'

'I know dad,' Ryan said. But he knew that wasn't true.

'Look Ryan, let me know how you feel in the morning. Let's go home now.'

Ryan followed his father out the door, turning off the lights in the lab as he went.

Deep down he knew he was going to do this. And his dad was going to make history.

CHAPTER 1 - 2009

Ryan and I were walking past the park on the way to school when he said, 'do you ever think about the future, Luke?'

Ryan was new at school. He only started at the beginning of this year. He moved up from Melbourne when his parents died, to live with his aunt, across the road from our house. It was cool having someone to walk to school with. My best friend Davey lived on a property over the other side of town and we didn't see a lot of each other out of school.

'Whadayou mean?' I said.

'You know, what'll happen years from now. What things will be like then, how the world will have changed?'

I shrugged. 'Nope. Do you?'

'Yeah, sometimes.'

'Why?'

He went quiet for a while and then said, 'I just think it'd be ... interesting, that's all.'

Our temporary teacher Mr Rosenberg announced that morning we'd be doing a project. He said we could work together in teams if we wanted to. Davey and I put up our hands as we always did and then I looked across at Ryan and asked if he could be the third member of our team.

Rosenberg said that was fine and handed out the projects. Then he wrote the title on the blackboard. 'Living in the Future'.

I turned to Ryan but he just shrugged. Had he known what the project was going to be? Maybe he was psychic.

There was still a lot of noise in class as everyone worked out who was in whose team. Over the noise Rosenberg explained that

each of the teams had been given a different year to work on and that all the projects fitted together.

Once we were all in our teams and settled down, he said, he would ask us each to read out our project years.

Jenny Lee, the brains of our class, and Davey's dream girl, wasn't picked for a team. Which wasn't unusual. Who wanted to be shown up by the brains? And since we had three in our team Rosenberg suggested one of us might like to team up with Jenny.

Davey, who'd never had the guts to even speak to Jenny before could barely control his excitement. He almost fell off his chair getting his hand up.

I glanced at Jenny who had a 'whatever' look on her face and then I looked at Davey. 'Sorry guys. Duty calls,' he whispered.

I rolled my eyes and Ryan grinned.

'Did you know the project was going to be on the future?' I asked Ryan as we walked home together.

'No.'

I shrugged. 'So, how ya wanna go about it then? Will we split the questions?'

Rosenberg had given us ten questions to use to start us off on the project.

'Yeah, let's do it then. You take the first five and I'll take the last. We can look at them separately and then get together. See you tomorrow.'

'Sure,' I said as we arrived at my house. Ryan went right and I went left.

'How's Ryan settling in?' mum asked as we sat down for dinner.

'Okay,' I said. 'We're doing a project together.'

'What's the subject?'

'Living in the future.'

‘Umm. Interesting. How far in the future?’

‘About twenty years. Rosen ... I mean Mr Rosenberg (mum has a thing about using people’s titles, especially teachers) gave us questions. To make us think about what things will be like then.’

Mum stopped what she was doing and just stared into space. ‘Luke?’

‘Yeah mum.’

‘I just remembered something. It probably won’t help with this project but there’s a stack of books down in the basement, the ones your ... dad used to use at school. Every now and then I think of them but I forget to tell you.’

As I went down the stairs to the basement I pictured in my mind a stack of books up against the far wall covered by an old curtain. The computer was in the basement – dad had set it up down there. He liked to prepare his classwork in peace. And besides he said the computer was best kept in a cooler place.

I liked to do my homework down there because, well, it made me feel like my dad was still around. He left us a couple of years ago. I don’t know why and mum doesn’t either. He was a teacher at the high school and everything seemed fine. He loved his job, and as far as I knew, he loved us.

Then one day he just didn’t come home after school. And we never heard from him again.

I went straight over to the curtain and pulled it back. The books were all hardcovers and thick. I took the top three books off the pile and put them on the desk next to the computer. They were geography textbooks.

I remembered how dad used to tell us stories about the seven wonders of the ancient world. It almost made me wish we could go back in time and see it all. One day I really wanted to go to Egypt and see the pyramids.

He also taught history but wars were kind of boring and you could only see so many dead bodies.

I started shifting more books onto the desk. As I discarded each lot onto the floor I picked up another three or four and scanned the indexes of each one to see if there was anything about the future.

There was a book on the world wars, as I expected, and another on famous battles. Then a book on the Greek islands and another on South America. No good.

By the time I'd gotten through most of the pile I was bored. But then I came across one of those two hole punched folders filled with pages of what looked like dad's handwriting.

As I skimmed through the pages I saw lots of diagrams and heaps of mathematical calculations. They looked like notes for a class, but dad only taught geography and history and it didn't look like either of them. Maybe they weren't dad's notes after all.

'Find anything useful?' mum asked from the top of the stairs.'

'Nope. But there's some of dad's notes down here.'

Mum sounded surprised. 'Really? Your father's handwriting?'

'I think so,' I said as I started stacking the books up against the wall, 'but its not geography or history. It looks like maths, or science maybe.'

'Can you bring them upstairs Luke? I didn't know there was anything like that down there. I thought it was just textbooks.'

'Yep,' I said as I threw the curtain back across the books and started climbing the stairs.

Mum looked through the notes as she drank her coffee.

'Well?' I said, 'is it dad's?'

She shook her head. 'Yes, it's your father's handwriting all right. But I don't understand any of it. Could you take this to school tomorrow and show your teacher?'

'Yeah, sure,' I shrugged.

‘Hey,’ I said as Ryan came out of his front gate the next morning.

‘Hi Luke.’

‘Did you look at the questions?’ I asked.

‘Yeah. I did three of them. How ‘bout you?’

‘Yeah, I did two. I would’ve done more but mum reminded me my dad left a whole bunch of books in the basement and I went down and sorted through them all.’

‘What happened to your dad?’

‘He left us. A couple of years ago.’

Ryan nodded. ‘Sorry,’ he said.

‘Yeah, well, not as bad as losing both your parents. At least I still have my mum.’

‘Yeah,’ he looked thoughtful and then he said, ‘so’d you find anything interesting in the books?’

‘Just a bunch of textbooks - dad used to teach history and geography at the high school. And, yeah, I found these notes my dad made,’ I said as I pulled the folder out of my school bag. ‘Mum couldn’t work out what it all meant so I brought them to school to show Rosenberg.’

‘Can I have a look?’

‘Sure,’ I said as I handed him the folder and we started walking.

Then Ryan stopped.

‘What?’ I said.

‘Oh, nothing.’

‘Why’d you stop then?’

Ryan looked down at the notes and then up at me.

‘Just ... well my dad was a scientist and he had a lab at the university. He did notes just like these.’

‘Really? What sort of scientist?’

‘He was a physicist.’

‘What’s a physicist?’ I said as I shoved the folder back in my school bag and we started walking again.

‘I’m ... not real sure but he works ... worked with matter and energy. Stuff like that.’

‘Sure, okay,’ I said, without a clue and thinking I’d look it up on the Internet later.

Rosenberg was interested in how everyone was going with their ten questions and we said we’d covered five already. Davey, for the first time in his life, had actually done some homework, no doubt to impress Jenny. They’d decided to split the questions as well and Davey had done two. Jenny had done all five of hers.

I laughed to myself. He’d have to do better than that to impress her, I thought.

After class I showed Rosenberg dad’s notes and he agreed with Ryan. He said he thought they looked like physics notes, perhaps even quantum physics (whatever that was) because of all the calculations.

‘Would you mind if I borrowed these notes Luke? Just overnight? I have an interest in science and I’d like a colleague of mine to have a look at them.’

I hesitated, wondering if I should. But after all mum had asked me to show him.

‘I’ll have them back to you tomorrow.’

‘Sure,’ I said, ‘no problem.’

That afternoon we were on the other side of the road from the park, on our way home from school when suddenly Ryan said.

‘Do you believe in time travel?’

‘Time travel?’ I said, stopping. ‘What made you think of that?’

He looked serious and then he glanced around. ‘Can we just go over to the park for a minute?’

‘Sure,’ I said as I followed him across the road. ‘You wanna use it in our project? I mean, who knows, they might have even invented it by then.’

Two little kids were playing on the monkey bars and a woman was sitting, painting near one of the picnic tables. There was a flask of what was probably coffee on the table. We sat down on a bench beside the footpath under a huge fig tree.

Ryan said, ‘no, I don’t want to use it in the project.’

‘Then what?’

‘I know you’re going to find this really hard to believe Luke. And I won’t blame you if you think I’m nuts. Really. But I have to tell you something. And I’d like to think we can trust each other.’

Trust each other? I’d only known Ryan two weeks. I remembered the day I saw him coming out of Mrs Mac’s house across the street. You couldn’t miss his white blonde hair. And then he’d turned up in class.

‘Trust?’

‘Yeah, well I have to tell you something, and it’s kind of secret.’

‘Secret? What?’

‘I don’t belong here Luke,’ he said, ‘I belong in 1979.’

CHAPTER 2

At first I just laughed.

But he looked so serious. He couldn't be, could he?

'What?'

'I belong in 1979.'

'Yeah I heard you the first time. You can't be serious,' I said, hoping he wasn't. A funny sick feeling started in the pit of my stomach.

'I'm serious Luke. And I need to tell you about it.'

What did he mean he belonged in 1979? That was ... thirty years ago. He wasn't even born then.

'Why me?' I exclaimed.

'You're a friend. Aren't you?'

Was I? I hadn't really thought about it, yet.

I shrugged. 'Okay.' What else could I say?

'I told you my dad is a physicist. Well, he invented this ... device that makes it possible to travel into the future. Six weeks ago he tried out his experiment on me. I left 1979 and ended up here.'

The sick feeling was slowly working its way up. I tried to speak but nothing came out. This isn't happening, I told myself.

Then I laughed again, sort of. 'Wow, when you get into a project, you really get involved, don't you?'

'I'm serious, Luke.'

Maybe I was daydreaming, and I'd wake up any minute. But I knew I wasn't, I could still hear the kids playing on the monkey bars behind us.

'You have to believe me,' Ryan was saying, 'I wouldn't lie about something like this. My dad sent me thirty years into the future and now I can't get back.'

‘But you said your parents were dead.’

‘I said I’d lost them. I didn’t actually say they were dead, but my mum is. And in a way I’ve lost my dad, after all he’s back in 1979.’

‘I know it’s hard to believe. I’ve been wanting to tell you for ages but I was ... afraid. That you wouldn’t believe me.’

I swallowed.

‘... Luke?’

I looked him in the eyes. He was scamming me, he had to be. But why? Unless of course he was nuts. I shivered at the thought. Had I made friends with a lunatic?

‘So, you don’t come from Melbourne then?’

‘No, I live ... lived in a house across the road from where you live.’

I got slowly to my feet. On TV they never panicked when weird stuff like this happened, they just walked away slowly. I planned to do the same.

‘You’re crazy,’ I said.

Ryan looked up at me, ‘but it’s the truth,’ he said.

‘See ya,’ I said as I walked away.

Would he come after me?

As I reached the footpath I started to jog.

Did he have a knife?

Then I started to run. Thinking back it was a pretty cool thing to do, I thought. Not panicking. As I turned the corner I slowed down. But my heart was still beating a hundred kilometres an hour, I could hear it.

And then I heard footsteps behind me.

‘Luke?’

I froze to the spot.

‘Luke? I need your help.’

I turned around to face him. ‘The only help you need is a psychiatrist,’ I said and started walking again.

‘I knew you wouldn’t believe me,’ he said.

‘You’re right about that,’ I said, as anger replaced the sick feeling in my stomach. What did I do? All I did was try to be friendly. How did I know he was nuts?

‘Luke? Please!’ he pleaded.

I stopped again and looked around. Was anyone watching?

An old lady was gardening across the street but she didn’t look up. And there were some younger kids playing in a yard a couple down. They didn’t look up either.

Was I imagining all of this?

Suddenly Ryan tapped me on the shoulder.

‘Don’t touch me,’ I shrieked, leaping away and walking on, quicker this time.

‘But I need your help,’ he said.

‘My help? To do *what?*’ I was still walking only now it was more of a jog.

‘I need your help to get back to 1979.’

‘How?’ I laughed bitterly.

‘Those notes of your dad’s, the ones you took to school today. I thought maybe ...’

Geez. I’d forgotten all about them. I hoped Rosenberg wouldn’t lose them. Mum’d go ballistic. Ryan was beside me now.

‘But I don’t know anything about those notes. I didn’t even know my dad was interested in science.’

‘Well, it’s just that I was thinking ...’

‘What?’ I yelled back at him.

‘Well, I was just wondering if maybe your dad was working on the same sort of stuff my dad is.’

I stopped walking. What was he saying?

‘Stop scamming me,’ I said.

‘I’m not. I just thought maybe your dad was experimenting’

Now it was sinking in.

‘Experimenting?’ I squeaked.

‘Yeah, well, it’s possible. You said your dad disappeared a few years ago and he never came back.’

‘Yeah, so what?’

‘But you also said he had no reason to go. That everything was okay with him.’

I didn’t like where this was going. It scared me. It was one thing for Ryan to tell me he was in another time. It was another thing to suggest my dad was as well.

‘Lots of people disappear. For all sorts of reasons.’

Ryan sighed.

‘You think my dad’s gone to some other ... time, don’t you?’

‘Well ...’

‘You do, don’t you?’

‘I did, Luke. I went to another time. And I guess your dad could too.’

If what Ryan was saying was right, then maybe, just maybe No. He was making it all up. And he was using my dad to get to me. That was unforgivable.

I thought about the last time I’d seen my dad, and how much I missed him. Mum got way out of hand at footy matches. She was always jumping up and down at the sidelines and screaming. It was embarrassing.

I leaned back against someone’s front fence and thought about what Ryan had said. A leaf floated down from a tree overhead and landed on my shoulder. I picked it off and started tearing it into strips.

Maybe dad was doing the stuff Ryan talked about. But time travel? That only happened in movies.

‘No. I don’t believe it. I won’t believe it.’

‘But it’s possible, Luke. It really is.’

‘My dad left us. It’s been nearly three years now. If he was gonna come back, he’d have done it already.’

‘What if he can’t get back? Like me?’

I didn’t really have an answer. My mind was whirling around in all directions, trying to make sense of it all. I shook my head to clear it.

‘But if what you’re saying is right your dad has made the biggest discovery on the planet,’ I said.

‘That’s right.’

‘Oh, come on. Time travel doesn’t exist. We all know that. Why are you doing this, Ryan?’

‘Because I really want to go home, to prove that people can go into the future ... and go back.’

Another leaf fell and I tore it to strips as well. Why was I even standing here listening to this?

‘So, what then?’ I asked. I don’t know why I asked. After all, I didn’t really believe him.

‘Well, I’ve been thinking about it and since we don’t have a time machine here’

‘What happened to your dad’s ...?’ I couldn’t think of the word.

‘His lab isn’t there anymore. I arrived there and it’s a classroom now. I walked all through the building and I couldn’t find it anywhere.’

‘So your aunt ... she is your aunt, isn’t she?’

‘Yeah she’s my aunt Jess but she isn’t related. She’s our next door neighbour in 1979. When I arrived six weeks ago and couldn’t

find the lab I went to our house – it’s the red brick one next to Aunt Jess’s. And anyway, new people are living there.

‘It was horrible. I didn’t know what to do. But then I remembered Aunt Jess. So I knocked on her door. She stared at me for so long I thought she’d died. Then she finally asked me who I was. That’s when I panicked.’

‘And?’

‘I tried to explain to her about the experiment but she didn’t want to know, like you. She just kept saying that it couldn’t be me. Then I remembered her dog Reggie. He’d got run over the day before I left. He was at the vet’s and I didn’t know if he’d made it or not so I asked her.’

How did you know that? she asked.

Because it’s me, Ryan, I said.

‘She just stood there shaking her head. Finally she told me to come inside. It took hours to convince her, but I just kept telling her things I knew about her and our street back in 1979.

She hadn’t even known I’d been gone in 1979. When I left it was the start of the school holidays. She said she didn’t see me for a few weeks but she just thought we’d gone away on holiday somewhere.’

Ryan was rattling this all off so quickly that somehow it sounded like he couldn’t be making it up. And what really worried me was that I was actually starting to believe him.

‘But I did go back – she told me that. We just have to find out how.’

He really believed this. He really believed he was from another time. Maybe, I decided, I should just go along with it.

For now.

CHAPTER 3

He shrugged. ‘So anyway, as I was saying, since we don’t have a time machine I wondered if we could find some way to contact my dad. In 1979 our computers were big and slow, not like the computers you have here, at school.

‘My dad’s computer is called a mainframe and it takes up half the lab. I heard about email and I wondered if’

I laughed out loud then. I think I needed to. I was feeling strange, like I wasn’t really me.

‘First of all computers do lots of cool stuff, but go back in time? No way. And his computer’s so old’

‘But couldn’t we try? Don’t computers have a way to dial out? I saw something on the TV about it.’

‘Yeah, it’s called a modem. It hooks up the computer to a phone line and then you can dial out, but only to another computer hooked up to the Internet. Your dad’s wouldn’t be. The Internet wasn’t invented then.’

Ryan’s face fell. ‘What does the Internet do?’

I just shook my head. Maybe he really is from 1979, I thought.

‘Let’s go home to my house and I’ll teach you about computers.’

‘So that’s how it works,’ Ryan finally said after I’d shown him how to get into the Internet and surf, ‘wow, I wish we had this back in 1979.’

‘Yeah, well ... it’ll be a few years before you do. But at least when you get it you’ll know what to do with it.’

What was I saying? Humour him. That’s what they said to do on TV.

We'd been downstairs in our basement for over an hour when mum called from the top of the stairs, 'Ryan would you like to stay for dinner?'

'Oh, thanks Mrs Hogan but I'd better get home. I told Aunt Jess I'd only be an hour or so.'

'Your aunt's welcome to join us too. We'd enjoy the company. Do you want to check with her?'

Ryan looked at me and frowned. 'What if your mum finds out about me?' he whispered.

I whispered back, 'its okay, we won't say anything,' I said and then turned away and rolled my eyes.

Ryan went back up the stairs and I heard the front door closing. I felt like my head was all full of stuff. I think they call it information overload. And I had it, that's for sure.

But just imagine if my dad really was out there somewhere.

There was a knock on the door and I went upstairs to meet Ryan and the lady across the road we knew as Mrs Mac.

After dinner I told mum we had to do our project and we went downstairs. We left her and Aunt Jess (she asked me to call her that) talking at the dining room table.

As we made ourselves comfortable at the computer Ryan said, 'so you don't think there's any way we can phone my old number or anything like that.'

'We can't - not through the Internet anyway. But we could try sending a fax.'

'What's a fax?'

'Its where you type a message up and then you send it across the phone lines. It comes up on a computer at the other end. Or if you have a fax machine, it prints out exactly what you sent.'

Ryan shook his head. It looked like he was having as much trouble with technology as I was with time travel. ‘Could we give it a go then?’

‘Well, we could but your dad probably wouldn’t have his computer hooked up to the phone line.’ This was sounding more like mission impossible every minute. But what did it matter anyway?

‘No, I suppose not.’

He looked so disappointed that I said, ‘well, why don’t we try anyway. But wouldn’t your telephone number be the same as the one in the red-brick house?’

‘Yeah, you’re right,’ he said sighing.

I was trying to think of something when he said, ‘no, that’s not right. We have a different phone number in 1979 – it only has six digits. Aunt Jess’s phone number has eight.’ He shrugged. ‘They must have added two numbers ... sometime.’

‘Yeah, they did. Well anyway, write down your phone number and a message to your dad and I’ll try to dial out to it.’

Ryan grabbed a pen and notebook and started to write while I went into the fax on the computer. Then I put in his dad’s name and their phone number and typed the message which said:

Dad, I’m here in 2009 but I can’t get back. Please help. The phone number here is 9902 0823. Ryan.

I dialled. We waited.

An error message popped up in the in-box to tell me the number wasn’t available. I wasn’t surprised and explained to Ryan what an error message was.

‘Now what?’ I said.

‘I don’t know.’

‘I guess the telephone exchange doesn’t have that number listed anymore.’

‘Pity we couldn’t tell the computer to go back thirty years. Maybe then we could communicate with my dad’s computer.’

‘Yeah,’ I said thinking it was a lost cause, ‘how does his computer work?’

‘It uses a bunch of white cards with holes in them – the holes represent coded information and they’re hand fed into the computer.’

‘Yeah,’ I said thinking back, ‘we learned about that at school in the history of computing. I saw pictures of it in a textbook once. That was how they programmed computers way back.’

‘So I guess that’s how your dad’s computer would read a message. It would print out on cards and then he’d feed them back in to find out what they said.’ What was I saying?

Ryan nodded. ‘I suppose that’s right. I really don’t know much about it.’

‘Now we just type a code straight into the computer and it can read it. Maybe we should talk to Rosenberg. That person he mentioned might be able to help.’

‘He wouldn’t believe us Luke,’ Ryan said, ‘lets face it – you’re having a hard time believing it. A teacher definitely wouldn’t. We’ll have to try to work this out ourselves.’

After school the next day Rosenberg called me over. I told Ryan I’d see him at footy practice.

‘Thanks for lending me your dad’s notes,’ Rosenberg said as he handed them back to me. ‘My colleague was very interested in them.’

He looked at me kind of strange, glanced around nervously and then said, ‘And you don’t understand anything about these notes?’

‘No,’ I said, wondering why he was asking.

He smiled and shook his head. ‘That’s okay Luke. I was just wondering if you might have known what your dad was working on?’

I shook my head. ‘Dad never talked about his work. Well, not to me anyway. Besides, he taught history and geography, not science.’

‘Mmm. Well, thanks for letting me look at these. They’re certainly intriguing.’

‘Sure,’ I said.

‘By the way, how’s the project coming along?’

‘Yeah, good. We’re getting through the questions.’

He nodded. ‘Is Ryan going okay?’

I didn’t say anything for a second. I didn’t know what to say. Should I tell Rosenberg about him? That he was nuts and believed he was from 1979?

Nope, I decided. Rosenberg might think I was nuts as well.

‘Yep.’

Rosenberg smiled again. ‘That’s great Luke. Keep up the good work.’

I walked away thinking about the conversation I’d just had with my teacher. Weird, really weird. I don’t know why but he was acting strange. Was there something going around?

And it had something to do with those notes of dad’s I was sure of it. Did he know what the notes meant? I wondered ...

Footy practice was starting in ten minutes. I ran over to the sheds to change. Davey was already there pulling his boots on. Ryan was out on the field talking to coach.

‘So, how’s the project going Davey?’ I asked. I hadn’t talked to him in a couple of days. I guess I’d been preoccupied and besides every time I saw Davey he was with Jenny. ‘Or should I say, how’s Jenny?’

Davey’s face turned red. ‘She’s real smart you know,’ he said.

‘Yeah, I know.’

‘We’ve been working on the project, together. At lunchtimes, in the library.’

I raised my eyebrows. ‘Really?’

His face, which had just returned to normal colour turned red again. I kind of felt sorry for him. Jenny Lee was a lot smarter than Davey and I wondered if he was really enjoying it as much as he said he was.

‘C’mon. Let’s get out there,’ I said.

An hour on the football field left me feeling wrecked. It’d been months since our last game and to warm up coach made us jog around the oval and then do ten hundred-metre sprints. When we finished that he made us practise scrums.

Most of us hadn’t played any sport at all since last year and it was hard going. Most of our scrums ended up in a heap on the ground. And most of us ended up in fits of laughter. Coach wasn’t impressed.

He gave us a start of season talk about not missing practice and about dedication and motivation. Same as last year. But this year he added stuff about wearing the right gear and making sure we were ready to practice, and ready to play whenever we ran onto the field.

It wasn’t so much a trial as a pre-season warm-up. We all knew we’d make the team. After all, there were only twenty two of us trying out.

I looked over at Ryan a couple of times. His face was red and he was puffing. I wondered how they’d trained back in 1979.

What was I thinking?

Finally coach told us all to grab weights from one of the lockers inside.

‘Oh do we have to?’ Davey asked.

‘Just five lifts boys, that’s all and then we’re out of here.’

At last it was over. I felt as if every muscle in my body, even muscles I didn't know I had, were stretched to the limit. It hurt to walk. It hurt to raise my arms. It just hurt.

'Do you always train this hard?' Ryan asked as he collapsed onto a bench and put his head back against the wall, still puffing.

'Yeah, usually,' I said. 'at the beginning of season. Coach is all fired up. He was last year too.'

Davey was gasping as he struggled out of his boots. I wondered what Jenny Lee would think if she could see him now. That made me smile.

But even that hurt.

As we walked home I said to Ryan, 'what's football like in 1979?' Humouring him. That's what you're doing, I told myself.

'Well we sure don't train like that,' he said, 'maybe a few laps around the oval and a couple of sprints. I've never done weights before. Practice is usually over in half an hour.'

'Dad said that professional footballers these days are real athletes. They spend heaps of time in the gym and have whole teams of medical people working with them.'

'Really?' said Ryan, 'things sure are different now.'

We didn't say anything for a while, mostly because we were too tired to open our mouths. Me especially, because he was starting to sound more convincing by the minute. Finally our houses came into view.

'By the way, Rosenberg asked me about those notes of dad's. He wanted to know if I knew anything about them.'

'What did you tell him?'

'I said dad never talked to me about his work,' I shrugged, 'and he didn't.'

'Do you think he knows what they are?'

‘Yeah, I think so. In fact, I’m sure. He acted strange, kind of nervous. Maybe, just maybe there is something to what you’ve been saying.’

Ryan smiled.

‘Tell me how it works. Tell me how your dad was able to send you into the future,’ I said.

CHAPTER 4

Ryan frowned. ‘It’s complicated. I don’t understand it all myself. But it has to do with speed. Dad’s been studying this stuff all his life. Have you heard of Einstein’s theory of relativity?’

‘Nope.’

‘Well, Albert Einstein was a scientist in the early 1900s and he made the discovery that time isn’t the same for everyone. He said it can be, well, stretched or shrunk. And it all has to do with how fast you’re moving.

‘So, my dad invented this, um, I don’t know how to explain it ... with the computer ...’

‘A program? A computer program?’

‘Yeah, I guess. It makes the cylinder spin really fast ...’

‘What cylinder?’

‘Inside the lab there’s this huge glass box attached by hundreds of wires to the computer. Attached to the box there’s this cylinder made of some sort of special metal. Anyway, once it’s spinning fast enough it triggers this huge ... burst of energy that runs through the wires and explodes inside the glass booth sending whatever is in the box forward in time.’

I just shook my head. He almost had me, but now he’d lost me again.

‘You still don’t believe me, do you Luke?’

‘What would you think if someone you just met said they’d been sent into the future? Would you believe them?’

Ryan shrugged. ‘I suppose not.’

‘So you were sent forward. Why 30 years?’ I said.

‘It wasn’t supposed to be 30 years. Dad said I’d probably go forward a few seconds or maybe a minute. He’d tried the experiment

with objects before like a thermos flask and a pen, and a pair of shorts. And they all disappeared from the glass box.

‘But he still didn’t know if they had arrived in the future and if they had, where or when. He needed a person to try it.’

‘So you volunteered?’

‘Well, not exactly. I didn’t want to but I knew dad wouldn’t give up until I tried. He’s been working on this experiment for years. I don’t think he’ll ever give it up.’

‘But you came forward 30 years?’

‘Yes. Something went wrong. Something in his calculations maybe, I don’t know. 30 years is a long time and anything can happen. And it has. My dad’s lab isn’t here anymore. My dad isn’t here anymore. And I’m stuck here.’

I thought about things for a while. I still didn’t understand any of it. But it was an interesting idea.

‘So without a lab here you can’t go back?’

‘I don’t see how. Unless we can somehow contact my dad in the past and he can reverse what he did and get me home.’

Suddenly I thought of something. It must have been footy training. It might have destroyed every muscle in my body but my brain was thinking clearer.

‘You know how you said it’d be good if computers went back in time?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, what if I turned back the clock on the computer? That would force it go back in time wouldn’t it?’

Ryan shrugged. ‘Well, I don’t know anything about it, but if you think it’s worth a try’

We ran the rest of the way home, despite our sore feet and aching calf muscles.

‘How was footy?’ mum asked as we both burst in the door.

‘Gross,’ I said as we hurried down the stairs.

‘Must be a good project,’ mum called after us.

Ryan pulled a chair over and we sat down in front of the computer. I waited while it booted up and then clicked the start menu. From there I went into control panel and then to Date and Time.

‘Glad you know what you’re doing,’ he said.

‘It’s a long shot,’ I replied, ‘a real long shot. But I’m turning the computer’s clock back to 1979. What day should we contact him?’

‘The day I left was December 8.’

‘And what was the time?’

‘Does it matter?’

‘Only that your dad was probably working in his lab at that time and we need him to be there then.’

‘You’re right,’ Ryan smiled, ‘Make it 8.30am. We arrived at the lab around 8.00am.’

I went into the date and changed it to 9/12/1979 and then I changed the time to 9.00am.

I smiled then too. Even if this didn’t work, it was something different and I was having fun. But I could see Ryan wasn’t, he was deadly serious.

After I reset the date and time I went back into the fax. ‘What was that phone number again?’ I asked.

Ryan recited the phone number and then the message he had memorized for his dad. I typed in the details and hit send. We waited. Nothing happened at first and then an error message popped up in the in-box.

‘Sorry,’ I said, ‘no go.’

‘Well, it was worth trying.’

‘Hey, wait a minute,’ I’d thought of something else, ‘sometimes when you change default settings you have to reboot the computer.’

‘What?’ Ryan said with a puzzled look on his face.

‘Oh. Well when you change things like the date you sometimes have to turn the computer off and back on again before it accepts the changes.’

‘Whatever you say.’

I rebooted the computer and noticed that the old date had been accepted. Well, that was something wasn’t it? Then I went back into fax again and typed in the number and the message all over again.

‘You wanna press ‘send’?’ I asked.

‘Yeah, okay then.’ We swapped seats and Ryan took hold of the mouse. ‘What do I do now?’

I looked at the screen and then at him trying to make the mouse work and decided I’d better hit send. Mouse lessons could wait.

‘Here, I’ll do it this time,’ I said, ‘you can practice with the mouse later.’

I grabbed the mouse, placed the cursor on send and clicked.

Ryan just shook his head. ‘I don’t think I’ll ever get the hang of this.’

‘Don’t worry, we all had to start somewhere.’

The message had gone. We waited. Nothing. Then I could hear the fax redialing.

‘What’s it doing now?’

‘If you don’t get through the first time it redials twice.’

We must have waited ten minutes and still there was nothing.

‘No error message this time,’ he said.

‘No message at all,’ I said.

‘Do you always get an error message if there’s a problem?’

‘Yeah. Usually.’

‘What does it mean then?’

‘It’s probably because your dad doesn’t have a phone line hooked up to his computer.’

‘Hmm.’ His face dropped. ‘Well, thanks anyway. I’d better be going,’ he got up to leave and turned around. ‘Maybe we could speak to Mr Rosenberg after all. Maybe he can help.’

I just nodded as Ryan started up the stairs.

I was still thinking about how there was no error message and wondering why.

‘Yeah,’ I said, ‘sure.’

At breakfast the next morning Mum said that we were all going on a BBQ on Sunday. She’d talked to Aunt Jess and decided it would be nice if the four of us could head down to the beach for the day.

I was only half listening. All I could think about was why we didn’t get an error message. I hadn’t bothered changing the clock back to 2009 yet. I just had a funny feeling about it.

‘Luke? Wouldn’t that be good?’

‘What? Oh, yeah, a BBQ. Sounds great.’

Mum looked at me suspiciously.

‘Are you okay?’

‘Yep, just thinking that’s all.’

Later in class Davey was going on about his aching muscles when suddenly Jenny Lee walked into the room. Davey looked up, all smiles.

‘I thought you were in pain,’ I said.

‘Just my heart,’ Davey replied.

If Rosenberg hadn’t been watching I would stuck my fingers in my mouth and pretended to throw up on the floor. Instead I just laughed half heartedly.

I didn’t know whether I was just disappointed that we hadn’t been able to contact Ryan’s dad back in 1979 ... even though I still

didn't really believe it. Or whether the hope of finding my dad was vanishing as quickly as he did. Either way, I couldn't concentrate for the rest of the day.

Even Davey with his pathetic attempts to get Jenny Lee's attention couldn't get a smile out of me. I was glad when the day was over and Ryan and I were walking home, without saying a word.

At my front gate he said, 'Aunt Jess says we're all going on a BBQ on Sunday. I like going to the beach, but ... well, what do they wear now?'

I realised I'd been moping, thinking about my dad. Not that I didn't think about him, but I had been, a lot, ever since Ryan said he'd probably gone into the future.

'What?' I said, 'oh, board shorts.'

'What are they?'

I cracked a smile. 'You want some lessons with the mouse? And I'll lend you a pair of mine.'

'How was school?' mum asked.

'Yeah okay I guess,' I said.

'Still doing your project?'

'Yep.' The Project. I thought about that. We had to hand it in Monday and we still had to write it up.

'Want something to drink?'

'Yeah, thanks. I'll take them downstairs.'

By the time I got downstairs with our drinks Ryan had already booted up the computer and was playing with the mouse.

'So what's the right hand button for?' he asked.

I really laughed then for the first time in days.

'What's so funny?' he said.

'Nothin'. It's just that my dad was a real expert with computers but since he left I've had to teach myself. It's good knowing more than someone else for a change.'

‘You know a lot more than I will ever know. We’d better get to writing this project up. Have you finished all your questions?’ he asked as he pulled a notebook out of his school bag.

‘You okay?’ I asked.

‘Yeah, I just keep thinking about home. If only I could go back.’

‘Yeah.’

‘But the computer isn’t going to help us, is it?’

‘I don’t think so. But maybe we can do some research on the Internet, you know, look for some info on time travel. Maybe someone’s come up with something new over the past thirty years.’

‘Good idea,’ he said, his voice sounding brighter. ‘So what else has happened in the last thirty years, what sort of things have they invented?’

I stopped and thought about that for a while. Where to start?

CHAPTER 5

‘Wow,’ Ryan said.

‘And there’s cable TV. Does your aunt have cable?’

‘I don’t know. But she has heaps more channels than we do in 1979. We only have four.’

‘Then she has cable. She probably likes the movies, there’s heaps of movie channels. There’s all sorts of great stuff you can watch, like music DVDs ...’

‘What’s a DVD?’

‘Its like a movie, only it comes on ... I’ll go get one and show you.’ I raced upstairs. Mum had bought me the Star Wars trilogy on DVD for Christmas. I grabbed it and took it back downstairs and showed it to Ryan.

‘You just plug them into the DVD recorder and watch the movies on TV. Of you can listen to music on a CD.’

‘What’s a CD?’ Ryan asked, looking exasperated.

I laughed again. ‘I’ll show you later. Then there’s all the stuff they’ve been doing in space, space shuttles and ...’

‘Slow down, slow down,’ Ryan said, ‘I know about man landing on the moon.’

‘Yeah, but did you know they have a space station up there now with astronauts actually living on it?’

‘No!’

‘Yeah, and there’s Americans and Russians, and Japanese living together up there and they have animals and plants up there as well.’

Ryan shook his head. His mouth had dropped open.

‘Wow. Can you show me more about all those things?’

‘Sure. Let’s just write this up and then we’ll go onto the Internet.’

And, I thought, the way things were going it looked like we’d have the rest of our lives to look at all the other stuff anyway.

We spent about an hour on the project, finishing off the questions and then turning it into an essay.

‘That’s enough I reckon,’ I said as I sat back in my chair and stretched my arms up over my head, ‘how about I get my mum to look at it over the weekend. She’s pretty good with this stuff.’

‘That’d be great. Do you think we’ve done okay?’

But I wasn’t thinking about the project anymore. I was staring at an icon on the status bar at the bottom of the computer screen. An icon I’d never seen before.

‘Hang on,’ I said, ‘what’s that?’

‘What’s what?’

I held the cursor over the icon and it read *you have one new facsimile message*.

At first I felt excited but then reality took hold and I realised it was probably just a delayed error message.

‘What is it?’

‘We have a new fax message but it’s probably just the error message that didn’t come through yesterday. I’ll just have a look.’

I went back to the desktop and clicked on the fax icon. The inbox opened and sure enough there was a message. I double-clicked on it and it opened up.

It was only short, a couple of sentences. We both read it out together.

Ryan, its dad. I’m so relieved you’re okay. I’m working on getting you home soon. I miss you. Dad.

I couldn’t believe it. I just stared at the screen. A message from Ryan’s dad. Thirty years ago.

I felt a rush like you feel after coming off a roller coaster ride. But I couldn't remember ever having felt this excited. It was an unbelievable feeling.

Ryan hadn't been scamming me after all. He'd been telling the truth. I felt bad, really bad that I hadn't believed him.

'It's him Luke,' cried Ryan, 'it's my dad. It worked!'

We were both up and out of our seats in a second, jumping up and down, punching the air and yelling. 'Yes,' I yelled, 'Yes, yes, yes!'

'What's going on down there?' mum called.

We looked at each other. 'Do you think we can tell her now?' I said.

'I'll go get Aunt Jess,' Ryan said as he raced up the stairs, grinning from ear to ear.

What I couldn't work out was how Mr Taylor had received our message in the first place. Well, it didn't matter did it? He'd received it. That's all that mattered.

An hour later we were all sitting at the kitchen table. Mum just kept shaking her head, 'I can't believe this Luke,' she was saying, 'how can this be?'

'Dad was working on quantum physics in his spare time I guess, when he wasn't teaching. That's what those notes were about. I asked Mr Rosenberg about it and he showed them to someone he knew. He said it was definitely quantum physics.'

Mum looked down at the fax message we had printed. She put the piece of paper on the table and put her head in her hands. 'I always knew Peter had an interest in physics, he did some courses when Luke was really young. But I just thought he'd gotten it out of his system. I'm just finding this all ... oh, I don't know.'

'Karol,' said Aunt Jess with tears in her eyes, 'its true. All of it. I lived next door to Ryan's family back in 1979.' She put her arm

around him. ‘I remember when he disappeared – and when he came back.’

‘I just don’t know what to think,’ mum said, ‘I keep thinking it’s a dream and I’ll wake up. Luke, you’re telling me that your dad probably found some way to go into the future. Is that what you’re telling me?’

Aunt Jess, Ryan and me all nodded our heads.

There was complete silence for a couple of minutes until finally mum said, ‘so what now then?’

We all went downstairs to write a reply to Ryan’s dad. I wanted to ask how his dad communicated with us without a modem and Aunt Jess wanted them to know she was looking after Ryan and not to worry. There were so many questions we all wanted to ask but in the end we made it pretty simple.

I typed the message in because Ryan wasn’t used to using a keyboard and we figured it would take him all night. The message said: *Dad, I’m okay. I’m staying with Aunt Jess. My friend Luke helped me do this and he wants to know how you received the message. Love Ryan.*

I figured that was long enough. I still didn’t know how Ryan’s dad was receiving the message or what it looked like. And obviously it took a lot longer to go through than a normal fax.

That was probably because his computer was so old and the message had to somehow cross the time barrier and then maybe print out on hundreds of those little white cards.

I clicked on send and we all sat back. And waited. Ryan and I played games on the computer while we waited, for an hour.

Finally he and Aunt Jess left and then mum burst into tears. ‘I’d love nothing more than to know that your father is alive Luke and that he’s okay. But I just can’t believe this. It doesn’t make any

sense. If he was working on something like this why didn't he tell us? Tell me?'

'Maybe he thought we wouldn't believe him.'

Mum dried her eyes and nodded. 'Or maybe he thought I would think he was wasting his time. But Luke, please be prepared that this could all be false alarm.'

'I know mum.'

After that I checked the computer every fifteen minutes until I went to bed. And I checked it as soon as I woke up the next morning and then every fifteen minutes after that. But there was no reply.

I really hoped it wasn't just one of those once in a lifetime things that never happen again.

Davey came over around nine and he and Ryan and I kicked the football around down at the park. Davey's mum had gone to an appointment and just before lunch she picked him up.

He looked a bit depressed when he left. And he hadn't been his usual jokey self all morning. I thought maybe it was because the project would be over on Monday. Maybe he could see his relationship with Jenny Lee fading into the background.

I kind of felt sorry for him but then if he didn't have the guts to talk to her all this time ... well, what could you do?

And then I thought, well I hadn't really seen much of him lately. He probably thought I'd been spending lots of time with Ryan, and he was right. But I couldn't tell him what was going on, could I?

Ryan and I spent some time on the Internet researching time travel. But the more we read about it the more confused we became. We didn't have the knowledge or the equipment to build a time machine.

And in any case all the websites talked about manmade virtual wormholes, black holes and neutron stars. After an hour reading that stuff we weren't any better off. Neither of us had ever heard of

neutron stars, we'd heard of black holes but we didn't know what they were and the only wormhole I'd ever heard of was in the TV show Sliders.

And those people had never been able to go home.

In the afternoon we watched my complete set of Star Wars movies. Ryan looked completely blown away by them. I thought it was excellent seeing his reactions. I'd seen them five times already. But for someone seeing them for the very first time it must have been awesome.

All afternoon I kept going downstairs to check the computer. 'There's still time,' I said hopefully as mum came into the room, 'we don't know how long that last message took to come through.' Mum sighed.

'I had a look at your project Luke. It's good. I just made a few changes, nothing major though.'

'Thanks mum,' I said, 'I'll let you know as soon as anything comes through.'

'So all this time you were supposed to be doing your project, you were actually dreaming up ways of contacting Ryan's dad?' she asked, a half smile on her face.

'Yeah, well not all the time, just some.'

Mum shook her head.

Rosenberg had given us the year 2027 to work on. The questions had all been about the changes between now and then. We had to think about food, clothes, houses, schools and technology.

Doing the project with Ryan had been good too because we'd been able to compare the changes between 1979 and now and think about what could happen in another twenty years.

We'd decided that food and clothes probably hadn't changed that much, but inventions and technology were something else. In the

project we'd invented flying cars – someone had already invented a car that sailed on water and we wanted to go one further.

Our house had push buttons for everything including the vacuum cleaner. You just had to program the vacuum cleaner and it cleaned exactly where you wanted it to while you sat on the lounge and watched TV.

Then Ryan thought of a remote controlled classroom that changed from a science lab to a library to a theatre with the flick of a switch.

'And what about if ... the teachers were holographs?' I asked enthusiastically.

'What's a holograph?'

'Oh. Oh well its ... like a movie of something, but it's a moving picture of a person. Its like its there but its not really.'

'Really?'

'Yeah.'

'Okay then.'

And just to show we'd actually done some serious thinking as well we had invented a cure for cancer. It was a natural remedy that we got off a website and involved eating some sort of plant that was boiled in milk.

We were pretty stoked about the results. And we were having fun while we did it. Better still it took away our impatience at waiting for the fax. Well, almost.

I made mum's changes to the essay, mostly grammar and spelling mistakes. English wasn't my best subject. And I put a cover sheet on the front with both my name and Ryan's. Then I printed it off and put it in my school bag for Monday.

Ryan went home for dinner and I went upstairs to have a shower. I was drying myself when suddenly mum came racing into the bathroom.

‘Mum! Do you mind?’ I shrieked as I pulled the towel over me.

‘I’m sorry Luke,’ she said, turning away, ‘but there’s a message on the computer. I knew you’d want to see it.’

CHAPTER 6

Mum said she knew what the icon meant but she wanted to wait until I came downstairs to open it up.

Half dry, I pulled on shorts and raced downstairs after her. Sure enough there was an incoming fax message. I opened it up and we read, *Ryan, please be at the laboratory at precisely 8.00am tomorrow.*

Mum raced upstairs for the phone. I sat there staring at the message, wondering how on earth we would be at a laboratory that didn't exist anymore. We hadn't told Mr Taylor that part.

Within minutes Ryan and Aunt Jess, in her dressing gown had appeared.

'You said the lab didn't exist anymore didn't you?' I said.

'Yes, I mean, no it doesn't exist as a lab. Its still part of the university but it's a classroom now. It's where I arrived.'

'Will that matter? That it's not a laboratory anymore?'

'I don't know. Maybe I just need to be in the same place that I left from. And at the time dad said. It may be my only chance.'

'How will you get into the classroom?' Aunt Jess asked, 'its Sunday tomorrow.'

'I don't know,' I replied, 'usually kids don't go to the university at all – I've never even been there.'

'I can show you where it is,' Ryan said, 'but what if we can't get in?'

'Just leave that to me,' Aunt Jess said mysteriously.

Ryan and I exchanged looks.

'Let's all get an early night. We have a big morning ahead of us,' mum said.

But I couldn't sleep. I doubted if Ryan could either.

I lay awake thinking. About Ryan. About dad. About everything that had happened this week. If it worked, Ryan's dad would be welcoming him home tomorrow and Ryan would be telling him all about 2009. It was just like our project, sort of.

Ryan could tell his dad how our suburb had changed and the clothes, and the cars, and all the technology. Maybe his dad would invent things now that he'd know what was possible in the future ...

At 6.30am the next morning, mum and I were in the kitchen, half heartedly chewing on pieces of toast.

'Well I guess we won't be going to that BBQ at the beach,' mum said, 'and I've got all that food in the fridge.'

'But its not every day you watch someone going back in time,' I replied. Mum patted me on the shoulder and smiled. 'Even if it doesn't work Luke it has certainly been an experience, one we'll never forget.'

At 7.00am Aunt Jess, Ryan and myself were all standing in the drive waiting for mum to back the car out of the garage. Aunt Jess had an old camera with her, it was called an instamatic, and she was taking photos of Ryan and me together. They printed off as she took them so she gave me one to keep and the rest to Ryan.

I'd borrowed a digital camera from school, to use for my project, so I'd told Rosenberg. As mum pulled up I took a couple of photos of Luke and Aunt Jess together. Then mum got out of the car and Aunt Jess took one of mum with me and Ryan.

'Even if Ryan's dad can help to bring Peter back, it may be a long, long time,' mum said as we drove away.

I was glad to see mum was being more positive, even starting to believe, but I knew that seeing my dad again was a real long shot.

It was a twenty minute drive to the university and I wondered why Ryan had said we would need a map. He had brought a map with him, the one he had found at the university the day he arrived.

As we drove through the gates I looked around in amazement. I couldn't believe how big it all was, it was more like a city. Buildings everywhere. And they all looked the same, a dull grey cement colour. And there were sporting fields, parks and seating areas with lots of trees, and a pool, a huge Olympic sized pool. Amazing.

Ryan was directing mum where to go so we all stayed quiet. Finally after about five minutes we parked and Ryan led us up to a building and through the front door. I noticed there were heaps of people around. Students I suppose.

'Why are all these people here on a Sunday?' I asked nobody in particular.

'Some of them live on the campus,' Ryan said, 'well, at least they do in 1979. It's up on the third floor, Room number 438.'

'There's 400 rooms in this building?' I asked.

'No, it's just building number four and it's the 8th room on the 3rd floor. 4-3-8.'

'Oh,' I said, thinking that I might know more about computers than he did, but he was sure ahead of me on some things.

The lift arrived and we went up to the third floor. Ryan looked up and down the corridor and we stepped out of the lift. The corridor seemed to go on forever in both directions but Ryan turned left and we followed him. Finally we reached room number 8 and Aunt Jess peered in through a small glass window in the door.

'It's empty,' she said, 'thank goodness for that.'

Ryan tried the handle but the door was locked.

'Now what are we gonna do?' I asked.

'I said I'd take care of it,' Aunt Jess said as she reached into her bag and pulled out a tiny piece of bent metal.

'A bobby pin?' mum said.

'An old trick of mine,' Aunt Jess replied as she pushed the bobby pin (whatever that was) into the keyhole and fiddled with it

for a while. Finally we heard a click and she turned the handle. The door opened and we stepped inside. It was 7.25am. We had thirty-five minutes.

‘Where were you standing when you left?’ I asked.

Ryan was looking around the room as if trying to work out where things should be.

‘The machine was just about here,’ he said standing just in front of where the blackboard was and stretching his arms out.

‘So I must have been standing about ... here.’ He moved to the left and closed his eyes, standing perfectly still. We were all quiet, afraid to speak in case he lost his concentration.

When he finally opened his eyes, he looked straight ahead and then stepped just slightly to the right. ‘This is it,’ he said, ‘I’m sure of it.’ He reached into his pocket and pulled out a coin, placing it on the floor where his left heel was, and then walked over to Aunt Jess.

I looked at my watch. 20 minutes to go.

Aunt Jess gave Ryan a hug and a kiss and just stood there with him. ‘If it all goes well, I’ll be seeing you again soon,’ she said, a tiny smile on her lips.

Mum wished him all the best and told him how it had been lovely having him around and how he’d been such a good friend to me.

I didn’t know what to do. I had a real sick feeling in my stomach. He really had become a good friend. And if this worked I would probably never see him again.

We shook hands but then he put a hand on my shoulder and we hugged. I stepped back and checked my watch for the tenth time. Sixteen minutes to go.

‘I’ll miss you Luke,’ Ryan said, ‘thanks for everything.’

I fought back tears. I couldn't let mum and Aunt Jess see me crying. 'Me too,' I said as Ryan turned towards the window and I turned towards the wall.

Aunt Jess was counting down the minutes out loud. On the way over in the car we had been listening to the radio and she'd suggested we all synchronise our watches. They were all exactly the same time now.

We waited. The time seemed to drag. Ryan was still looking out the window, as if he was taking it all in so he would remember it later. I left him alone. Besides, I didn't know what to say to him. What was there to say?

'Four minutes to go,' Aunt Jess said, looking at Ryan.

He turned around and walked back to the spot where the coin was, putting his left heel over it.

'Don't forget to find out how your dad communicated with us,' I said.

'Yeah, I know,' Ryan smiled as he patted the right hip pocket of my board shorts – they'd been a present from me, a going away present. 'I've got a whole list of questions in here from you and Aunt Jess, all typed up and ready to ask. And,' he said patting the other pocket, 'I've got the photos too.'

'Have you got our phone number? Just in case?' I asked.

'Yes, dad's got it. Remember?' I nodded. Of course he did.
7.56am, 7.57am, 7.58am.

'Here we go,' he said, 'something's going to happen. I just know it will. I can feel it.'

8.00am. We waited.

Nothing happened.

Ryan looked as though he was glued to the spot on the floor, he stood upright and perfectly still, as if he was afraid to breathe.

8.01am, 8.02am.

There was a knock on the door.

We all looked over.

Through the glass window I could see Rosenberg standing outside.

‘What’s he doing here?’ I said.

8.03am, 8.04am.

Mum looked puzzled as Rosenberg opened the door and came in.

8.05am.

Suddenly there was a rumbling noise. As it started to build I turned to look at Ryan but a flash of blinding light shot through me and I lost my balance, landing with a thud on the floor. Shielding my eyes with my arm I slowly got back up.

Ryan was gone.

It took a moment but then I realised that someone else was standing where Ryan had been. Someone with dark hair, just like me.

Mum gasped, really loudly.

I stared, unable to believe what I was seeing. Every muscle in my body was twitching. Tears were stinging the backs of my eyes.

It was my dad.

I was vaguely aware of Rosenberg walking across the room. ‘Peter,’ he said, ‘welcome home.’

Dad shook hands with him, smiled and said, ‘glad to be back, Terry.’

Aunt Jess grabbed mum’s arm as she began to sway around. My head felt much the same way.

Then Rosenberg explained.

‘My real name is Terry Robertson. I was Ryan’s best mate at school in 1979. He simply disappeared one day and I knew Taylor had been working on some really weird science so I challenged him.

It took me nearly thirty years to find someone who would actually believe me, and help me get Ryan back.'

'Dad,' I said.

He nodded. 'But our experiment backfired, and I ended up back in 1979.'

'So you met Mr Taylor.' I said.

'Sure did. In fact we've been working together all this time to try to find Ryan and bring him home.'

'And when I sent that fax ... geez, I thought it was a crazy idea.'

Dad grabbed my shoulder and squeezed. 'I'm so proud of you Luke. Your crazy idea is the reason I'm standing here right now.'

Rosenberg, I mean Terry said, 'A chip off the old block, eh Peter?'

I could feel my face turning red. It was pretty cool, I thought. What I'd done I mean.

Dad grinned at me. 'I made program adjustments to Taylor's computer but that was just the beginning,' he said as I walked with him over to mum.

'So Ryan's gone back to 1979?' I asked.

'I guess we'll never know for sure Luke, but I'm fairly confident.'

'So,' Terry said brightly, 'now that we know it works Peter, maybe we ...?'

Mum splurged out something that was completely incoherent.

'No way!' I shrieked, turning to dad.

With raised eyebrows he said, 'Terry, maybe *you* ... could write a scientific paper on the *possibility* of time travel.' He hugged us both. 'But for me ...'

'Yeah,' I cut in, 'for him, he's all out of time.'