

“Be careful daddy,” whispered my little girl. I pulled her in close, kissed her straw coloured hair and promised she’d see me again within an hour. I hated to leave her; it had only been a year since she had lost her mother, didn’t want her to worry about losing me too. The thought brought back tendrils of misery that I had sought to drown with each passing day yet still I managed a smile.

“Today’s the most important day of my life sweetie, this is man’s biggest achievement since space exploration. “

She looked up at me with sky blue eyes that carried innocence life was yet to remove. “But you’re leaving me daddy, why is it important?”

“I’m going to the future Lily; do you know what that means?”

“What?”

“It means maybe, if time travel works, just maybe I can go back. Maybe we can save mum.”

Her eyes lit up with something I hadn’t seen in years. My little girl found hope.

“Love you sweetie. I’ll be back soon, promise”.

“You better be, or I’ll gnash my terrible teeth and roar my terrible roar.” She jumped into my arms once more and bit my shoulder.

“Please, mercy!” I laughed. I put her down and ushered her towards my brother, he’d take care of her during my absence. “Take care my wild thing.”

“Riley, you’re up,” announced the project supervisor, “cameras are on in 5, look sharp, every man on earth is watching this.”

With my head held high I walked towards the centre of the room. Seated upon a platform was the device that had all our attention. It was a seemingly inconspicuous white pod of moderate dimensions. Little lights flashed around its surface in response to the team of scientists tapping away at their buttons only metres away. Although one would deem this machine inconsequential at first glance, it would in fact shape the very course of humanity. The world’s greatest minds created this in order to usher in world peace, to correct man’s previous blunders. This pod was a time machine and I would be the first man to travel. My heart raced faster with each step I took towards the device. Doubts began to form. What if the tests were incorrect, and what if the machine was to fail? Upon approach of the time

machine I looked back to my daughter for the final time. She was a strong girl, like her mother, but beyond the facade she carried nothing but pain. A despondency that had formed since her mother's loss, since the accident. I had to do this, if not for myself, I had to do it for my little girl.

A well-dressed man with piercing green eyes and flowing gray hair made his way towards me. He had not spoken a single word since his arrival yet his presence occupied the entire room. He carried himself with an air of authority few men managed to grasp and upon his shoulders stood the weight of all our futures. This man was Nicholi Vella, creationist, inventor of the time machine.

"Greetings Riley, I hope you're just as excited to see this work as I am."

"Undoubtedly," I began. "Thank you for giving..."

"Uh," he interrupted, "we're pushing the schedule, please, take your seat".

A soft mechanical whirr was the only sound made as the entrance hatch opened. Nicholi ushered me into the machine and strapped me down.

"Now remember, you'll be transported exactly one year into the future. While we do have the technology to send you there, we can't bring you back. But the space time continuum dictates that we should be waiting, good luck."

Nicholi gave a nod to the team of scientists and the hatch began its decent.

"Godspeed Riley."

As the hatch closed darkness engulfed the inside of the machine. All noise from the outside world had ceased, it was me and my thoughts, my beating heart. I made a futile attempt to calm myself but my nerves had gotten the best of me. I was alone, drowned within darkness, deafened by the silence. As if in response to my misery soft lights illuminated the cabin.

"Initiating travel," announced a mechanical voice.

It would be nice to have a human voice, something to create a softer ambience, bring forth a spurious sense of comfort.

"Stabilizing capacitors, travel commencing in 10."

My mind raced with a million thoughts.

“9...”

What if something went wrong?

“8...”

What would happen to my little girl?

“7...”

No, not ready, I can't do this.

“6...”

Its okay Riley, you'll be a hero.

“5...”

They said nothing would go wrong.

“4...”

I'll change the world.

“3...”

I can bring back Annie.

“2...”

Oh God.

“1. Destination reached.”

The familiar sound of gears at work signaled the end of the travel, the hatch was opening, this was it, I would be a hero. I braced myself for applause from the scientists, for a cry of joy from my little girl. The hatch opened and I was greeted with...

Nothing.

The room was as it was when I first left. The same white washed walls, same glass windows and panels littered with buttons. But one thing was missing; the room was void of life.

“Hello?” My words echoed throughout the building, disturbing the perfect silence that had long since taken place.

“Please, someone!” I shouted. Where were they? Was this their idea of a sick joke, had I been taken for a fool? Where, where was Lily?

With a brisk pace I made my way towards the front of the building. I had to find someone, had to find my little girl. With an air of worry I pushed open the facility doors. Sun glinted off the various cars parked along the street, building loomed as far as the eye could see but still not a single soul was in sight. I couldn't be alone, this wasn't right. A part of me wanted

to believe that this was just a prank, that I still had a chance. I needed to find others, needed to go back, maybe the rest of the world was but one hour behind, they needed a chance to catch up

The following days were spent in despair. In an abandoned house I lay, cursing god, cursing the men who sent me here. As the days blurred into weeks my anger was lost, instead I felt the unyielding grasp of despair. My little girl, my Lily. I promised her I'd be back, promised her she wouldn't lose her father too. Every part of my body screamed for me to give up, to just take my fragile life and fling it into hell's grasp, but I couldn't, I had to find a way back, had to do it for her. For the first time in weeks I stepped out of the house in which I sought reprieve. Food supplies were running low, I had to find more. A quick trip to a market revealed that shelves were still stocked with their usual surplus. Electricity and water flowed freely, cars littered the street, and packaged food was still in abundance. How was this the case if I was alone? I understood nothing, yet to find a way back I needed to understand what it was that brought me here. In an attempt to fathom the situation I made a library home. For months I sat reading about time, and more importantly, about space. As months passed all hope I had began to diminish, as did the knowledge the library had to share. When all was exploited I moved onto a new library, then another. I ravaged them all, bookshops, universities, all knew my mark. It took two years of analysing logic and theories, two years of reading before they answer was clear to me, before the realization truly set in. The scientists responsible for the preparations and calculations of my travel had neglected to factor in one thing. They had forgotten about the multiverse theory.

Think of time as a line surrounded by infinite space, upon each point of this line is a separate universe, all slightly different than the one before. There are an infinite number of universes set at different points in time, all with their own similarities, except for the people, they're just in one. And this was my universe - Population: Me. Part of me wanted to give up, wanted to lie down and let nature take its course but I had to go on. Had to find a way back, for Lily, for my baby. As time passed I began to forget, her facial features were no longer clear. All that was left was but a blur of the girl I called my own. I had learnt to bury my loneliness long ago. Days blurred into nights and I had accepted the darkness, the silence. Sometimes I muttered to myself, reassured the fact that I could still talk. My hair grew unkempt, messy, appearance no longer mattered, there was no one else to judge. I had

learned to cope with the emptiness, had begun to accept the loss of my daughter. But what made it all worse was the hope. I was at all times just an hour away from everybody I ever loved and yet forever out of reach. Sixty minutes is all that separated me from happiness, but I knew I'd never get closer. They never bothered to send a second person. Or even worse: They sent him to a point a second after my time. Trapped in his own universe the way I was trapped in mine. So close, yet so far apart.

The human mind is a thing of wonder. Desire something enough and your mind will give it to you. What I desired was companionship, so my mind gave me voices. At first it was little things, fleeting whispers in a restless wind. Whispers that told me it was okay, that I could go back, that I'd see Lily again. As time passed the whispers turned into voices, voices that would keep me company, with each passing day they grew louder and louder until they could no longer stay caged within my mind, as a result, the voices became people, hallucinations. I tried working around them, tried to find some way to program the machine to go back but they always intervened, always tried to tell me I was wrong. Sometimes I'd see Lily, a distorted image of the girl I remembered, of her golden hair and eyes so blue they'd put the sky to shame.

"You promised you wouldn't leave," she'd whisper. "you said you'd be back."

"I'm sorry," I'd sob. "I'm so sorry." I'd go to hug her like I did all those years back yet my arms would fall straight through her. When Lily was gone Annie would take her place.

"You let me die Riley, you let me die and now you've left your daughter".

"SHUT UP!" I'd scream. "YOU'RE NOT REAL! YOU'RE NOT REAL!"

"You said you'd take care of me, you said you'd take care of her".

"YOU'RE DEAD, STAY DEAD!" and with that I'd claw at her, claw at the apparition. Every time it would end the same, end with me on the floor sobbing, they were right, Annie was always right, I had failed.

Years passed me by; I had given up on working on some way back, moved on from that and fell into an abyss of despair that only grew larger as time passed. As my hope slipped away so did my struggle, I no longer sought to fight off the madness, I let it in, let it engulf me. I no longer knew what was real, couldn't distinguish between reality and fiction. I had finally fallen victim to my paramnesia. Time had taught me to block out my visions, to ignore my apparitions, yet on this day one arrived that I could not ignore. It spoke in a language I had

long forgotten, it was not obnoxious like the others, this one carried itself differently, while the others floated, this one moved as I did. I wanted it to go away, to leave me alone, it was trying to hurt me. I snarled but still it stayed. This wasn't real, I knew it, nothing was, I was alone. I closed my eyes, sought to make it disappear yet when I opened them it was still there. Why wouldn't it just GO AWAY? I lunged at the thing, I gnashed my teeth and roared as I clawed at the entity but it did not disperse like the others when attacked, this one was different, it screamed. I sat upon the mass and tore its flesh from its body but something unsettling began to form in the darkest corners of my soul. As the creature screamed I took a look into its eyes. Eyes so blue, eyes I hadn't seen since... with a final shudder the being stopped moving. The lifeless body beneath me was no apparition, while I abandoned hope she never did. A decade on and my little girl had come for me.