
A FUTURE
IN THE PAST

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Editorial Hipálage
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CHAPTER 1

DAVID was waiting alone, in silence. He was gazing into space with a carefree look in his eyes. His summer vacation had just come to an end, and contrary to what you might expect David could not have been happier about this. He was sitting on an uncomfortable chair in Tampa Airport lounge. He was obviously eager to make his return, it was only 6:00 PM and his flight was not leaving until a quarter past eight. He had accepted his lot even though he still had to wait almost two more hours before boarding. The plane would arrive in JFK airport at 11:15 PM, so he would probably not get to his house in Brooklyn until past midnight.

David Goodwill's face clearly showed the signs of a vacation in sunny Florida. His tanned complexion was undeniable proof that he had held up his side of the bargain. Nevertheless, he appeared pensive and absent. He was completely immersed in his own reflections.

This vacation had not been what it externally appeared. Forced upon him by his bosses, who were secretly working in evident collusion with his own mother, he had accepted it because there was no recourse left to continue refusing it. He had already spent four years giving false excuses every time the subject came up.

His holidays had started out feeling like some sort of punishment. All David could think about was how they

had conspired to make him take a three-week rest. How they had managed to separate him, for twenty-one days, from his work. How they had tried to divide him, for five hundred and four hours, from his secret passion: an unthinkable act.

David had spent three weeks in the Hyatt Regency Westshore. There, he had frequented the pool everyday, just for an hour, which was sufficient time. At first his only achievement was to change his pasty skin tone into a fiery cherry. But then, little by little, the red had subsided, and turned into a wholly unexpected bronze colour. He could not remember ever having been able to boast a suntan in his life. He was proud of this accomplishment; it was going to make his story more convincing.

He was still waiting for them to call boarding, all the while more thoughts crowding into his head. In retrospect, he had to admit that his holiday had not been a complete waste of time. It had certainly delayed the tests, but it had also allowed him to go over the theoretical side of his project in more depth.

David had celebrated his thirty-third birthday the previous May. By twenty-five he had completed his Masters in Physics. He had never had a girlfriend nor lost even a wink of sleep over a woman. He claimed there were more important things to cause him sleepless nights. He was passionate about science; a lifelong love affair that had taken seed at a very young age and flourished. At nine he decided he would study Physics. Now he assiduously devoured every scientific and technical article that came into print.

His current obsession, which had been keeping him awake at night for over four years now, began the day he read one such article. It gave lengthy details about the latest cosmological studies on what is known as the

Anthropic principal. This report led David into an endless chain of reasoning which he then decided to investigate more deeply. During these past four years, new theories had emerged to supplement modern cosmological principles, and using these advances he had begun to develop a theory of his own.

Nobody knew what he was up to, although everyone had noticed that he scarcely slept or rested. He was only ever seen spending hour upon hour wading through mountains of papers and open books. He was writing and working on formulae that no one around him was able to comprehend. When they asked him about it, he seemed not to hear and continued working in his own world. That was the real reason he had been forced to take these rest days, as a sort of punishment.

David received a large number of job offers when his university studies ended. He finally opted for the Whitehall Research Corporation. The weight that tipped the scales was when he casually found out, during the initial interview, that the Whitehall possessed an embryonic quantum computer. And what was more, that nobody would dare to use it.

David started work at half-past eight in the morning but arrived at the office everyday just after seven. His working day finished at half-past five, but it was unusual to see him leave before eight. He liked his work, but not to that point. The reason for his extensive working hours was that the office contained all of the necessary tools for his research. He did his investigations before and after his contracted hours. What was more, everybody had given up asking questions because it was useless. He had managed to become known as the 'mad scientist' and that suited him perfectly. After work, when he went home, he would continue labouring over his theories until

midnight. He would sleep less than six hours and then go back to the office.

However, during these last three weeks everything had been different. He had made unimaginable progress. Before leaving, he had skilfully hidden numerous books and notes among the clothes in his suitcase along with various CDs, which he told his mother were music. The finishing touch to the whole scheme was the purchase of a powerful laptop computer in Tampa. With all of these tools available, he had managed to dedicate fifteen hours a day to his project, right from the first day of his arrival at the Hyatt.

The loud speakers finally announced the departure of his flight. He stood up and collected his belongings together. They had asked him thousands of questions about the laptop at security and he had given away as little information as possible. *Damned intrusive controls!* David was convinced that it was all a complete waste of time anyway. He went towards the gate, carrying his boarding pass in his left hand.

Once on the plane, he sat down and immediately closed his eyes. He did not want to engage in mindless conversation with anyone. He pretended to sleep, which was the best way to immerse himself once again in his thoughts.

He thought about the roots of his theory. It was based on an article published four years ago that had deeply impressed him. According to the Anthropic Principal, “our universe must be very large and very disproportionate in respect to human beings”. David read great significance into this phrase since it fitted The Big Bang theory perfectly. After the Big Bang, the universe evolved and expanded for a long period of time, to allow the formation of the complex molecules

that were the origin of life. We could not exist in a smaller universe because it would not have had enough time to form these necessary molecules.

David's eyes remained closed. His phenomenal memory was allowing him to re-read the article in his mind.

The cosmologists who defended this theory had established surprising numerical relationships between gravity and proton mass. They were convinced these relationships would only be valid for the present cosmological period; that is to say, for several million years. David remembered how the Anthropic Principle concluded that everything had been created at a very special moment, one that would not last forever. The electromagnetic interaction of the universe which enabled atom formation and the conditions for fusion which allowed the atoms to generate nuclei, were processes which were only valid for a very specific cosmological period. That was the part which had the greatest impact on David.

The flight attendant's voice brought him back to the real world.

"Excuse me, sir. Would you like to have dinner?"

David gave her an icy stare. *Why wouldn't they leave him in peace with his thoughts?* He was going to turn away without answering when he saw her startled, deep, dark eyes. Something made him change his mind. Those ebony eyes seemed familiar. Somehow they reminded him of something or someone. He was surprised to hear himself answer.

"Yes, dinner, great, thank you very much! I'm sorry but I was completely out of it just then."

While he was eating, David wondered whether his vacation could really have relaxed him so much as to make him respond like that. In the end he decided it

had been a temporary blip brought on by those lovely eyes and that was the end of it. After his meal, he feigned sleep once again and quickly became absorbed in his private world.

The most recent discoveries about the cosmos indicated that our Big Bang was only one of many that had already occurred and that were still to come. This indicated that the universe was not immutable, as Einstein had imagined. There were questions as to whether the speed of light was, in fact, constant.

He heard a member of the cabin crew request the passengers to fasten their seatbelts and return their chairs to an upright position. The plane came into land on runway two of JFK airport. David was obliged to wait more than thirty minutes in baggage reclaim for his suitcase to come through. Once inside a taxi home, he closed his eyes again.

This time, he centred his thoughts on the law of Conservation of Energy. If energy could only be transformed and, at present, the universe kept on expanding, there had to exist something that was functioning as a thermostat, to maintain balance between the four fundamental forces of nature.

The driver's voice brought him back down to earth.
"That'll be twenty-seven bucks, pal."

David pulled thirty dollars out of his pocket and did not wait for the change. It was one in the morning. When he got inside the house, his mother was there waiting for him, wide-awake and hoping to make small talk. She was clearly very surprised to see her son's bronzed complexion.

"It's worked," he thought to himself.

"Should I make you some supper now? You can eat and tell me how it all went. Did you meet any nice girls? Oh, I bet you did. Tell me all about it, David."

“I already ate on the plane, Mom. I’m beat. All this traveling is a nightmare. But, yeah, I did meet a girl, with beautiful ebony eyes,” David said as he made his way upstairs towards his bedroom.

“And smart too, wasn’t she? David? But did you get her address? Are you going to write to her?” Evelyn Goodwill asked her son, as she watched him disappear into the darkness.

“Sorry, Mom, but no. I didn’t ask for her address because the right moment didn’t come up. She was the flight attendant, Mom. I love you. Goodnight!” said David before closing his bedroom door.

“He’s come back with a suntan, but I’m afraid nothing else has changed. This boy of mine is hopeless. He’ll never be any different. His father, God rest his soul, was always telling me, but would I listen?” Evelyn muttered to herself, as she turned the downstairs lights off ready for bed.

Up in his room, David did not waste any time. He quickly connected the laptop to his desktop computer, and began transferring all of his work from the previous three weeks. He needed to make numerous comparisons against his databases.

A sleepless night followed. He did not have to return to the office until Monday and intended to make the most of it. He focused on confirming the conclusion he had reached through his investigations and hypotheses. To do this, he first went over the method used in 1675 by the Danish scientist, Roemer, to measure light speed velocity by observing delays in the eclipses of Jupiter’s moons. He then imagined the discussions between Newton and Hooke on the propagation of light by vibration, as if he had been there with them. He sighed as he considered how Newton’s upper hand had prevented the wave theory of

light from progressing until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

“They lost nearly two hundred years because of it!” he exclaimed.

Next he went back over his books on the dual nature of light. In 1925 Louis Victor de Broglie put forward the theory that all particles carry light waves inside them, thus uniting Newton and Hooke’s apparently irreconcilable ideas. The idea that light had both a wave and a particle nature led to the birth of the most ambitious of the new and revolutionary branches of science: quantum mechanics.

David closed his eyes for a moment. Thanks to quantum mechanics he had found the missing link in his investigations. He would still have to check it all on the quantum computer at the Whitehall, but that was just a formality. It was seven in the morning on Sunday, August 26th, 2001, and he had just confirmed that his theory was correct. He was so sure. Light speed was the key to everything.

“I’ve got it!” he exclaimed jubilantly. “No one is going to believe me, but now I know it isn’t just a pipe dream, a mad scientist’s fantasy. I’m sure it’s totally possible... or more... incredibly possible,” he finished, holding his hands up to his face.

He got to his feet and walked to his bedroom window. He was tugging at his hair with nervous energy. Through the glass he saw the moon gleaming, totally oblivious to his emotions. He stared at it fixedly for a couple of minutes and then, without blinking, he asked:

“Tell me, moon, how long have you been there?”

CHAPTER 2

HE arrived early, as always. The attentive janitor at the entrance to his offices held the door open for him.

“Back to the old grindstone again, Mr. Goodwill?” He asked, flashing his teeth in a smile.

“No other option I’m afraid, buddy. How have you all been getting along without me?” David asked, shaking his hand.

“Same as ever, except for the heat. Boy, I hate August. What were you expecting, David? Nothing new ever happens in this massive block of cement. It’s just one day after another, wishing my life away, waiting for my vacation.”

“When does it start?” David asked, more out of courtesy than interest.

“On the 10th. I can’t wait. I’m going to see my daughter and grandson in Iowa. I haven’t seen them for three years” the doorman told him.

“You won’t even notice you went away, Jack. Before you know it you’ll be back here, stuck in this daily monotony. You’ll see. Vacations fly by so fast it seems like they never happened,” said David as he went into the Whitehall offices, “have a nice day!”

“Same to you, Mr. Goodwill...”

Not interested in waiting around to hear the doorman’s courtesies, David closed the door before Jack had even finished his sentence. With scarcely an

hour to spare before work, he headed straight for the quantum computer.

He connected his laptop to the network, transferred the data and started the calculations. He had baptized the quantum computer Marco Polo, having chosen this name as a sort of correlative correspondence. The first Marco Polo had opened the doors to Oriental knowledge; the modern one was going to open other new doors, no less significant.

Marco Polo could perform calculations one million times faster than conventional computers. At ten past eight the first results appeared on the screen.

Required temperature: 3,800 K

Transmission speed: 0.98547 C

Next, the results for load density, magnetic induction and electric current appeared. David looked at the screen in astonishment. The values were extraordinarily high. It was eight thirty. He decided to freeze the calculations for the time being. He made a note of the results and found his way to his desk, deep in thought. A few minutes later John arrived.

“Oh my God!” He exclaimed. “You look like one of those God damned window cleaners, completely toasted by the sun.”

“Do you have a problem with window cleaners?” David asked, rising to his feet to shake his boss’ hand.

“Only that they have the perfect job. They live it up in the sun all day and if it rains or snows they get the day off. Nobody can bother them because the sons of bitches are hoisted up on giant platforms, listening to music. And, as a reward for all the work they do, they can spy on everyone else through the glass. You don’t think that’s reason enough to hate them?”

“You’re full of it, John. You’re always kicking off about something. Hey, and I had a great vacation,

thanks for asking,” David tried to steer the conversation his way.

“Yeah, yeah, forget the stage-show, David. I’m not buying a word of anything you can or want to tell me. It’s all going to be a load of crap. I told you before you left that I wanted to see photographic evidence of you with at least a dozen naked hotties in your hotel bed. But now, come to think about it, even if you did show them to me I still wouldn’t believe your bullshit. You’re capable of making anything up on that computer of yours,” John taunted.

“Not necessary, there were no hotties, as you call them,” David replied.

“You see! You’re a compulsive liar. Nobody will believe that there aren’t any babes in Florida. Don’t you watch TV? All joking aside though, it’s good to have you back, David.”

“It’s good to be back. Thanks, John.”

“I at least hope the last few weeks have helped you discover that there’s a world outside work.”

“You can be sure of that. I’ve discovered plenty of new things lately,” David answered.

“Good for you. Let’s do lunch!” John suggested.

“I don’t know if I can because...”

“David!”

“Okay, okay, John. I’ll see you at twelve thirty for food.”

“That’s more like it. You have plenty of paperwork on your desk to keep you occupied until then. I’ve been waiting to get your take on the report from our subsidiary in California on the Trockton affair.”

“I’ll get right on it.”

“Good man, David.”

David opened the Trockton report. It was signed by one Gerald Campbell. He had not met him personally,

but had developed a high opinion of him over their working relationship. On the whole, the report was correct, but a couple of things seemed not to add up properly. The west coast was three hours behind so he would have to wait until after lunch to call for clarification.

He got up to go for a coffee, and went out to the vending machine in the hallway. He put his coins in the slot and chose the extra sugar option. He waited a few seconds before his cup of boiling coffee appeared.

The Whitehall had their offices on the 93rd floor of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. It was six years ago that they had moved there, much to their employees' delight. The offices were incredible. At that time, David had taken charge of the entire computing system. He had also supervised the installation of the power outlets and the network distribution, making sure that everything was working properly right from the start. He was the first employee to visit the new offices when they were still empty. He knew the exact location of all the electrical closets and transformers on his floor, he enjoyed looking at them.

He went back to his table in the main room. It was right next to John's glazed office. The Whitehall took up a large part of the south-facing side of the floor. The huge windows afforded an amazing view out over Liberty Island and across the bay, although the South Tower blocked part of Staten Island.

David opened another report. He began looking over it but was unable to concentrate. Thoughts about that morning's results from Marco Polo were running through his head. He decided he would repeat the same calculations after work and wait until he had all the figures. He wanted to see that morning's results confirmed. Then he would decide.

He looked out towards Ellis Island, pondering on how many dreams had begun inside those few square feet. His own great-grandfather arrived there from Ireland. Today's dreams were very different and he was just as eager to begin living out his own. He thought about Marco Polo again. Had it malfunctioned from three weeks of disuse? Had someone been messing with it while he was away? He was obsessed and this was not good. The office clock read midday, so on the West Coast it would be nine. Now he could call Campbell. Better to get it all sorted out before meeting John for lunch.

He spoke to his colleague in California. They had a polite exchange of views and decided to alter a couple of things. Gerald Campbell would update the file and send it across by e-mail while David was having lunch with his boss. They said goodbye with mutual wishes to meet on Gerald's coming visit to New York. He was going to get married on the fifteenth of the following month and was planning to spend the honeymoon doing a road trip across the States. He did not know exactly when, but he certainly intended to call into the offices.

Marco Polo came back into David's thoughts. The figures it had produced were surprising. They would definitely complicate the practical side of things. At that moment, John interrupted his ponderings.

"Should we go?"

"Where do you want to eat?" David responded.

"We're going to mingle with the tourists today. It'll stop you from missing your holidays. We're eating in one of the restaurants in the South Tower, floor 107. And hurry, I've spoken to Paola and she's reserved the corner table for us. It's the best one," John told him.

“Whatever you say, boss,” David agreed, glancing sideways at Marco Polo. “By the way, John, I’ve spoken to Campbell and it’s all sorted. He’s going to make a few small changes and you’ll find an e-mail with the final draft waiting for you when we get back.”

“Excellent,” said John as they walked into the elevator.

David tried to be polite over lunch and at least gave the appearance of listening to John’s sarcastic and biting commentaries. He brandished a smile whenever he was required to do so, but his mind was on Marco Polo. After coffee, David looked at his watch. It was ten to two.

“We’re getting stupid, John. It’s nearly two o’clock. We’d better get back now or my boss will fire me.”

“Right on, let’s go! Hey, today you’re not staying on after five thirty, right? We could go to the Village for a few beers. Isn’t that a great idea? Come on David, say yes and I’ll make you a deal, I’ll let you buy both rounds,” said John.

“That’s an enticing offer,” David replied as they walked back into the North Tower, “but I’m afraid today I can’t. I have to go to the doctor’s with my mother,” he added unconvincingly.

“There’s no cure for you, David, and you suck at lying. Go on and do whatever it is you do. I’ve done my part, I promised your Mom I’d try, even though I already knew what the answer would be. I wish you’d prove me wrong one of these days,” said John as he went into his office.

David paused for a moment. He knew he should have accepted John’s invitation, but he was unable to wait any longer. He needed more answers and would not be able to carry out the calculations on his laptop or his home computer. Marco Polo was the only computer

available to him that was capable of giving him results at the speed he needed.

John went home at six.

“You don’t have long, David. Don’t forget you have to take your mother to the doctors,” he mocked.

“Err, no, no, I won’t be long. I’ve only got about 40 minutes,” David responded, wishing John would leave once and for all.

John crossed the empty office and went out towards the elevators. David lost no time. He loaded the data back into Marco Polo and waited. The results appeared on the screen after just ten minutes. They were identical to the ones he had obtained that morning. Marco Polo calculated the rest of the data, producing hugely significant results.

He frowned and rubbed his eyes. Einstein and the first postulate of the theory of relativity flashed into his mind. What would the great man say now if he was by his side looking at Marco Polo’s results? They implied that Minkowski’s space-time diagrams should be interpreted from the perspective of the invariability of space-time intervals. David’s conclusion was proven without a doubt. His investigations and the data obtained indicated that it was possible to travel in time, with the proviso that the time traveler would appear in exactly the same place he had left from: same place, new time. This could be a major advantage to him as long as he managed to choose the correct place and moment to carry out the journey.

He printed the data and shut down the computer. He entered the elevator and left the World Trade Center. He felt a fine drizzle, fresh on his face. Wearing only a blue, short-sleeved polo shirt, he pointlessly pulled the collar up as some sort of reflex action to the cool air. The rain continued while David walked,

absorbed in his thoughts. He knew that the end was possible but he was lacking the means to get there. The rain fell harder. By the time he got to Fulton Street subway station, his trousers were completely drenched from the knees down. David walked towards the Line Two platform and the train arrived quickly, crammed full of people. He decided not to wait for the next one, at that hour and in the rain it would almost certainly come by just as full. He squeezed on and managed to detach himself from the situation, thinking about Marco Polo's calculations.

Among all the calculations, there was one that stood out as being of key significance. This was the fruit of a detailed analysis he had carried out of his own vital signs, age and weight. David had carefully introduced all of this data into the system, knowing it was extremely important. The number Marco Polo had produced clearly indicated that the maximum journey in time he could carry out would be over thirty-seven years.

The train stopped at Bergen Street station. David got off and came out onto Flatbush Avenue. It was not raining in Brooklyn. He had already walked the two blocks home before he realized that he was talking to himself out loud.

"I have to calculate the ideal destination date. I have to find a vehicular means of transportation," he repeated continuously, without inhibition, as he made his way through the crowd.

CHAPTER 3

SEPTEMBER arrived on time and with the same temperatures that had made August so unbearable. David had been in constant battle with himself since his discovery. He had proved his theory, but putting it into practice was going to entail huge risks. Even the preliminary testing was going to draw attention to situations he would prefer to keep hidden. But if he stopped now, stopped moving forward, what had all his work been for? What would have been the sense in spending so many hours investigating? And most importantly, how could he ever find peace with himself, if he let this great opportunity slip through his fingers?

In the previous few years, studies of the cosmos had uncovered many secrets that had been incomprehensible to mankind since the beginning of time. But what if human beings were not part of this cosmos? What if each individual human was a mini-cosmos in themselves? Why accept chronological order as the only means to measure time? Why not begin to look for alternative temporal mechanisms, offered by the cosmos itself? In short, why did people close their eyes to the evidence?

David had read and re-read all documented time travel experiments which had survived the skepticism of their respective epochs. Burrowing through them all, he had observed that a certain type of electrical activity was present at each and every one. Last century it was

discovered that what allows us to see the world around us is light waves. Many of the waves scientists have identified and whose existence we accept even though we cannot see them are electromagnetic. Examples include X-rays, infrared, ultraviolet and gamma.

David was thoroughly convinced that teleportation was an electromagnetic phenomenon which allowed you to change your temporal plane. He believed time was a constant succession of planes in space. Therefore, the only thing needed to change planes was an electromagnetic impulse strong enough to alter the frequency that our atoms vibrate at. On raising this frequency, the body would be transported to the past, if it was lowered, the journey would be to the future. The latter was David's objective. He only wanted to go to the future. At that time he felt no attraction whatsoever to the past.

According to Marco Polo's data, he was going to need a strong electromagnetic field to manage a jump into the future. To generate this field, an enormous amount of energy would be required. This was the first problem that David intended to find a solution to that day.

It was Wednesday, September 5th, and he had arrived at the office a little earlier than normal. Even though John was not going to be in today, David did not want the tests to have any negative effect on the work he was paid to do each month.

He warmed up Marco Polo and felt a small box in his pocket that he had brought in with him, hidden within the folds of his jacket. Then, he went out into the corridor as if going for a coffee. Checking no one was following him, he took a right and climbed two floors. He headed towards the power supply room. Inside, he connected the reserve transformer to prevent his test

from blacking-out the four floors that depended on this electricity source. He opened the fuse box and disconnected the differential limiters. He did not want his test to be interrupted by anything.

Next, he used an iron bar to cause a short circuit. This generated an electric discharge which formed a voltaic arc that David tried to maintain for a few seconds. The light was blinding and the temperature in the room had risen several degrees. He took the small box from his pocket and placed it near the arc. He went quickly to the fuse box and flicked the main switch. The arc disappeared into its positive pole, taking with it all of the small objects that had been within its radius: a spanner, a screw-driver, two fuses and the small box.

David re-connected the main transformer and disconnected the reserve. He tried to leave everything just as it had been ten minutes earlier. He left the room, pushing the door behind him. As the door fell shut he whispered:

“Have a safe trip, Poppy, I hope you’ve gotten there okay. Hopefully, I’ll see you in three weeks; you’ll have enough food until then. Take care!”

David passed Jack on the staircase.

“There’s been a huge dip in the electricity supply, I’m going to take a look,” the janitor informed him.

“I’ve just come from there, Jack, it’s all as it should be. It must have been the electricity company,” David answered.

“Thanks, David, no point in going up there in that case.”

They went back down to the Whitehall together. David went into the offices and the janitor went back to his station by the door. David had done his test. There was no way to be certain it had been a success, but yet he felt so sure. Everything had gone exactly as planned.

The only difference was that his own body mass would need much more energy. He would have to search for his own inter-dimensional portal in the basement of the World Trade Center. Inside the air conditioning plant rooms was where the biggest quantity of energy could be found. He saw no other option.

David had planned everything down to the finest detail. The day of choice was Friday, 28th of this very September. He had told his mother he would be going to Tampa again that weekend, and that he intended to return and go straight into work on Monday, 1st October. His mother was thrilled with this plan. She had quickly made the connection between this trip and his recent vacation. She was insanely happy. It did not take a genius to work out David was in love. Evelyn spent the whole day giving thanks to God. Her son was not as strange as she had thought.

The real plan for this last weekend in September was a completely different story. David was going to work all day on Friday and stay behind, as he always did, when everybody else left. He would then leave in the elevator, as he always did, but this time there would be no hanging around the entrance hall on the ground floor. On this occasion the basement would be his destination. There, he would repeat that morning's operation and change his temporal plane. He calculated he would arrive in the year 2029. The requirement that the point of destination was the same as that of departure meant all trips had to be over multiples of four years. The fourth dimension, space-time, requires the earth to be in the same position on the same date, which only occurs over a four yearly period. The previous year, 2000, had been a leap year, and 2028 would be too. This meant the current year of departure, 2001, corresponded to an arrival in 2029.

In all likelihood, the journey's start-up operation would seriously affect the building's energy supply, but that was unimportant to him because he would then be in the year 2029. He would remain in the future for two days and then come back from the same place, using the same system, early Monday morning. He would have to invert the energy so the trip would go in a reverse direction. He was certain the return operation would also cause energy problems, but he would leave those behind in the future, finding himself back in the year 2001. He would then rest for a few hours in the air conditioning plant room, and go up to work in the elevator at his usual time.

When he finally got home after work, he would have to undergo his mother's insufferable interrogations, but that was a completely different problem that he would deal with when the moment arrived. The most important thing was that his hopes were soon going to be fulfilled. In just a short time he would no longer be dreaming the impossible.

During the remaining three days of that week, David displayed an extraordinarily friendly and happy attitude towards everything he did. He was charming with his colleagues and with his mother. While his colleagues found this very strange, his mother was ecstatic. She attributed it all to the forthcoming weekend break that was starting on Friday, 28th. In reality his mother was not mistaken as to the date, only the destination.

Friday, September 7th, marked the end of the working week. David caught the subway as always. It was just passed seven when he arrived at Bergen Street station. An inopportune power cut delayed his exit. When he got out onto the street and felt himself once again in home territory, he took a deep breath. He was

exhausted and desperate to get home to give his mother a hug.

He found her in the entrance hall and kissed her tenderly on the cheek. She kissed him back and stroked his hair. David had always liked how she did this as it made him feel special. It was a gesture only for him.

“Mom, remind me when I get up tomorrow that I have to mail a letter,” he said to her.

“Well, I hope the person you’re sending it to will understand your message just in the way you want her to,” Evelyn replied, excited by her son’s extraordinary behavior.

“Dead right Mom, my whole future depends on it. I really hope I can make it all work out,” said David as he went up to his room.

Saturday, September 8th, saw a rainy start, but the sun soon shone through, brightening up the New York skies. David did not stay shut up in his room as had been his custom of late. He told his mother he was going out to mail the letter and buy some kind of keepsake; something meaningful and symbolic.

Evelyn could not let this occasion pass without giving vent to her hopes.

“Perhaps the best choice would be something to remind you of that special day. Something that will last the test of time,” she said enthusiastically. “Right honey?” she added.

“Yeah, Mom. It has to be something that rekindles memories, and certifies the date, origin, why and wherefore of everything,” David said.

“Exactly! That’s what I wanted to say,” Evelyn concluded.

“Thanks Mom, I love you. You’ve been a big help,” David told his mother.

He kissed her, opened the door and disappeared out into the patchwork of people in the street.

CHAPTER 4

SEPTEMBER 10th began like any other Monday. David left his house and made his way towards the subway station. As he was walking he wondered what the future held for him, the city was still dark, the night refusing to give way to a new dawn. He arrived at the World Trade Center. He instinctively looked up. The two towers rose majestically high above him, adorned with thousands of sparkling lights. He paused for a moment to contemplate them, then went into the entrance hall and headed towards the elevators.

The day came and went like any other. After work, David surprised John by inviting him to go for a few drinks in the Village. The drinks had been on rain check since mid-August.

John was astonished at David's proposition. He had not expected this plan to ever actually materialize. Could what David's mother had said be true? Could love really be the reason for this spectacular change? He decided to find out for himself.

They walked together in happy conversation towards the Bohemian neighborhood. Twenty minutes later, they got to Kenny's on Bleecker Street and went in. John ordered a bourbon and David a Diet Coke. John decided to get straight to the point.

"What's her name then, David?"

"I have no clue what you're talking about," David answered.

“Come on, Buddy. I’m your pal, aren’t I? Tell me how you two met. Don’t be so secretive,” John insisted.

“Even if I tried really hard to explain it all to you, you’d never get it. Trust me,” said David defensively.

“I said you were a lousy liar. It’s patently obvious you have a secret. There’s something you’re not telling me.”

“Maybe you’re right,” said David.

“And you won’t even tell me?” John asked again.

“Not even you.”

“Well at least tell me if she has blue eyes. I have a thing for blue eyes,” John smiled.

“They’re not blue, John. They’re a deep and delirious black. I can’t tell you any more,” was David’s answer.

“Hey that’s fine buddy. I always prefer to take a back seat when the heart is involved anyway. Just tell me how it went.”

“I can only tell you that in the end it was awesome. You just wouldn’t get it,” David repeated, shielding himself once again behind ambiguity.

“Ok, my friend. Congratulations on your indescribable experience. You feel free to keep your inexpressible secret. I get the message,” John said.

“Look, I really am sorry, John. But thanks for understanding; it makes me feel so much better.”

David’s two rounds were followed by another two bought by John. These were capped off with a few more. It was ten o’clock at night when they decided to go their separate ways. John had his car parked at the World Trade Center. David walked him to the parking lot and then went on to the subway station.

David got home at eleven, still showing clear signs of inebriation. He had followed his initial coke with a vodka and orange and a couple of bourbons then closed

the final round with a scotch. David felt nauseous. His mother had never seen him in this kind of state before. But she was unperturbed. It was obvious her son was changing and she was more than happy about it. What did it matter if he was a little tipsy? He was young and he could take it. It was much worse to see him always shut up in his room, with those sad eyes focused only on that mountain of books and papers.

Evelyn glowed with joy. Tomorrow she would ask more about this girl. She would do it tactfully, but effectively. She wanted more details and she knew it was not the right moment.

David went to bed without any dinner. His head was full of drums beating incessantly. He had a terrible night, so unusually bad that he actually slept. He awoke much later than usual, feeling positive nonetheless. He decided that just this once he could allow himself a small impropriety. And in any case, he had enough time to get to work.

He arrived at the Whitehall offices at ten past eight. Leaving his wallet and ID on his desk as usual, he went out into the corridor for a strong black coffee. He brought the coffee back to his desk and began taking small sips. It was boiling hot. He put it back down on the table.

It was eight twenty-three when John walked in.

“How did you sleep?” David asked him.

“Dreadfully,” John answered. “Yesterday we got stupid,” he added, rubbing his eyes.

“Sometimes a night isn’t just a night,” said David.

“I can’t think straight. Do you really believe what you just said justifies the whole thing?” John asked.

“I think it justifies most of it,” David said, gazing out over the bay from his desk.

“I’m going for a coffee. See if I can wake myself up. I almost didn’t come in today,” John said.

“Yeah, but I knew you would,” David replied, fixing his gaze on John. “I’ll wait so we can drink them together,” he added.

It was eight thirty-two when John went out into the hallway. He came back at eight thirty-eight and sat down opposite David.

“You seem tense,” said John.

“I don’t know how to answer that,” David responded.

“You’re full of contradictions, buddy boy. Those black eyes have messed with your head.”

“You know I think you’re right. I think this time you’ve hit the nail on the...”

David could not finish his sentence. It was exactly eight forty-six on Tuesday, September 11th, 2001. A tremendous jolt made the entire north tower rock. The coffees spilt onto the table. The colossal tremor knocked John to the floor.

“What the hell was that? A giant earthquake or something?” said John, scrambling quickly to his feet.

“I’m afraid it wasn’t just the elevator doors shutting,” said David, overwhelmed.

Shouts began coming from all directions. The two of them ran towards the north side of their floor. An intense, black cloud was swelling up that side of the tower. Everybody was asking each other what could have happened.

David and John went back to their office on the south side of the building. The smoke was visible from there as well, to the west. There was no doubt that some kind of explosion had been the cause of the fire. But what could have caused the explosion?

“The elevators aren’t working,” somebody shouted to their colleagues.

“We’re trapped,” shouted others, running frantically from one side to the other.

“There’s a terrible heat coming up from below. We can’t breathe in here,” said John, grasping a handkerchief to his mouth.

“You’re right,” David agreed. “Follow me!” he added immediately.

“Where’re you going?” John asked.

“Just follow me and don’t ask questions,” David answered.

The explosion had affected the power supply. David and John climbed up the stairs towards the floors above. They passed people going down, continuous faces coming and going in no set direction. It was the chaos of panic, the sheer desperation of knowing, with terrifying certainty, that they were trapped with no possibility of escape.

While climbing, David checked the power supply. It was completely down. Nothing was working. They continued upwards. More and more people joined them in the ascent. Virtually nobody was going down. David lost sight of John for an instant. He continued climbing while searching for him. He caught a glimpse of him by chance, running out onto the 103rd floor by himself. David called and went after him. Together, they approached the north-facing windows. The dense smoke blocked everything out. They ran towards the south side of the floor. There, they still had visibility to the East. It was two minutes past nine.

John saw an airplane coming towards them from the South. It was flying very low. Its flight path was inconceivable, yet there was no doubt it was heading towards the South Tower.

“But what the hell is this whack job doing?” John shouted, just a few seconds before the plane with the United Airlines flag crashed into the South Tower.

“Did you see that, David?” John stammered. “Do you think the same thing has happened here? The same kind of smoke is coming out of the South Tower as this one.”

“I think it might have” David answered.

“Then there’s no way out, David. It’s over for us!” said John.

“There’s always a way out. Don’t quit now. Follow me!” David said once again to his friend.

“But where?” John insisted.

“Don’t waste energy asking. Come on, keep going up.”

While they were climbing, David was thinking. His brain was quickly calculating their possibilities of escape. Going down was not an option so his planned escape route via the air conditioning plant room in the basement was totally useless. They had no choice but to go up.

The two of them continued climbing. Their survival instincts propelled them onwards in the face of fear and desperation. They finally got to the summit. There were a lot of people up there shouting and begging for help. Everybody was shoving each other and falling down in complete chaos.

“We’re finished. Nobody can get us out of here,” John said to David after a few minutes.

“You always exaggerate,” David responded, trying to snap his friend out of this newly found state of defeatism.

“Not this time, Buddy boy. I hope you find your way out. I’ve decided on mine. *Adios amigo!*” said John.

“John!” David screamed, powerless as he watched his companion jump into the smoky abyss. “John!” he cried again with tears in his eyes.

It was nine fifty-nine and David was stuck. He held the secret to time travel but was trapped in space. He was trying to think quickly but his mind was incapable of focusing. Around him people were in despair. Some had decided to follow John’s fateful example. Amid this absolute desperation, an almighty roar coming from a southeasterly direction became overwhelming.

It was the sound of continuous rupture, the simultaneous crunching of tons of glass and metal. Everybody turned and looked on horrified at the void that had taken the place of the south tower. It was five past ten. An unfolding cloud of dust was making it impossible to remain on the rooftop. David was about to go back inside when the solution appeared before his very eyes. He had been up there all that time but had not noticed it. How could he have missed the antenna? It was nine minutes past ten when he abandoned the roof. The remaining hopes of the people trapped on the rooftop had sunk along with the other twin tower. Most of them were praying as they awaited their dismal fate.

David went into the antenna reception and transmission control room. Almost unbelievably it was still working. It must have had its own generator. He tried to remember the figures that “Marco Polo” had calculated for him. He could use electromagnetic induction. It was ten eighteen. He opened the electrical closets. The heat from below had made all the metal scorching hot. He picked up a metal bar. It was ten twenty-two. He tried to create a short circuit but failed. The bar was burning his hands. It was ten twenty-four when he tried for a second time. He was successful at his third attempt and the luminous arc appeared.

It was then that David realized that he was unable to flick the switch while remaining close enough to the arc to be absorbed by it as the energy source disappeared. He desperately searched for something to help him. He found nothing of any use. Eventually he noticed a wooden pole long enough to allow him to maneuver the switch while guaranteeing that he would be entirely within the radius of the arc.

He grabbed the pole in his left hand. It was ten twenty-seven when he managed to hit the master switch in the antenna control room. The arc shone intensely, and then darkness occupied the room. The darkness was followed by nothingness. But this nothingness was not void of energy. And the energy simply transformed itself as it continued to obey the law of conservation. And the light returned. And then the light changed color. It changed to illuminate a new day.