

CHAPTER 1

"This is too cliché, Dad."

Blake pushed several buttons to display a specific pattern of multi-colored lights. "Don't worry. I'll paint it. It'll look nothing like a telephone booth, I promise."

"But no matter how you paint it, it's still going to look like one."

"Then I'll move the electronics into something else."

"No, you won't." Nathan scratched his head for a moment, looked at the large metal box and shook his head. "But then again, what else can fit a full-size person standing up that doesn't resemble a phone booth?"

"Exactly," Blake said. "What else do you expect me to do?"

Nathan walked to the door which made a hissing sound as it opened automatically. He greeted his father inside.

"Be careful what you touch," Blake said jokingly. "I don't want this thing to whisk you away."

"Oh, Dad. Really? Come on."

The push of each button made an annoying, awkward sound. The slide of each lever made an even more annoying sound.

"I think you're making a big mistake, Dad."

Blake ignored his son's comment and moved his hand along a plastic PVC pipe which concealed forty sets of color coded cables. Each set of cables contained eight sets of wires, and the wires at the other end split off into circuit boards of the same color.

"You're messing with the timeline, Dad. Don't say I didn't warn you."

"Yeah, yeah, I know. You already mentioned that." Blake disconnected one of the wires, and four blue lights went out. When he reconnected it, they immediately lit up. He disconnected another wire, and two green lights went out followed by a chime that sounded identical to an in-flight fasten seatbelt chime. He continued to disconnect each of wires while watching the indicator lights go off and come back on as he reconnected them. "Don't you want to see your mom again?"

There was no answer. "Nate?" Blake looked up to an empty room. He let out a huge sigh and continued to disconnect wires and watch the blinking lights while listening to specific sounds. He knew Nathan disapproved of this project from the start and to be quite frank, Blake was afraid of this becoming a reality. There was no way to know what to expect because the cameras he was sending into the past weren't broadcasting back to him.

After making a slight adjustment, he placed another mini camera on the floor of The Box and verified the time displayed on the control panel monitor. March 19, 2005, 3:00 P.M. He took a deep breath and pulled the lever. Another annoying sound filled The Box, then a pop, hiss, and a little bit of smoke appeared, which were all normal signs of success. Next was the bright flash of light, brighter than the past attempts. The camera was gone, and all that remained was an empty Box.

This time it was different. He sensed it. This time the flash was perfect. The pop and hiss sounds were crystal clear. With anticipation, he stared at the monitor, waiting patiently. An image started to form.

"Nate! Check it out! The camera went somewhere!"

He watched the monitor trying to decipher what the camera was displaying. "Nate? I need some help here, please!"

Nathan stood stone-faced in the doorway. "I don't like this one bit."

"Yes, yes, I know. Just come in here. What do you see?"

Nathan looked at the monitor. "I see... clouds? I can't tell. It looks like there's a lot of fog or mist."

Just then, a shadow-type image drifted across the monitor from left to right.

"Did you see that? Was that a bird? The shadow of a bird?"

"I don't know, Dad, it went by too quickly to tell. It could be. The camera may have been transported facing upwards. There's too much fog. I don't think this is the year 2005."

They both continued to watch for any signs of life when they heard what seemed to be an electric vehicle, judging by the high-pitched whir.

The vehicle sounded as if was driving on gravel. A few seconds later a crunching sound was heard followed immediately by the monitor going blank.

"It worked! It had to work! The camera went into the past, and a car drove over it!"

"Dad, we don't know that. We have no idea where the camera went or what happened to it. You can't assume anything. The sky didn't look like that in the year 2005. Please, don't assume it made it safely."

"What else could have happened? The camera was transported into the past, facing upward toward the sky, just like you said. It probably was a very dull and dreary day. We caught a glimpse of a bird flying above, heard a car as it drove by, and that's how the camera got squashed. We have a gravel driveway, don't we? We heard the car drive over gravel, didn't we?"

"No, Dad, I'm not going to confirm that. It didn't sound like a car to me. We don't know when or where the camera transported. We don't know what we saw or heard, and we don't know what happened to it. You're assuming all of this because that's what you want to believe. It could have exploded. Maybe that's what will happen to you if you transport yourself."

"No, it was a bird. I saw it. And it was a car. I heard it."

Nathan threw his hands up in the air. "I give up. Please, Dad, don't do this. Please." Nathan left the room almost in tears. Blake followed him until he reached the doorway. He shouted down the hall. "Look, Son, I'm very sorry, but this is going to happen. I miss your mom too much. The day that damn corrupt doctor caused her to die was the worst day of my life. I have to get her back. I'll be safe, I promise."

"No, you won't." Nathan stopped, turned around, and yelled back from down the hallway. "We don't know what it was that flew overhead. Maybe it transported to the prehistoric era. That bird you think you saw could have been a pterodactyl, and maybe a dinosaur stepped on the camera and crushed it."

"Oh, come on, a dinosaur that sounds like a car? Also, there were no cellular or wi-fi signals in prehistoric times. That's how this thing works. There's no way this could have been broadcasting from that period."

"Dad, that's not the point. That was an example. All I'm saying is those images could've been anything. Look, I give up. Please promise me you won't use this thing unless we have one hundred percent proof that it works."

Blake looked at his son but didn't respond. After a lengthy staring contest, Nathan turned around and rushed out the front door, slamming it hard behind him.

CHAPTER 2

"To me, it looks like the shadow of a bird."

Blake pointed his finger at Nathan who was playing a video game on his phone. "That's what I told him. And hear that? What does that sound like to you?"

"Umm..." Travis hesitated and looked at Nathan for the answer. When he didn't respond, he continued. "Well, I'm not sure. It has a unique whirring sound, but it definitely is motorized."

"Maybe a car?", Blake said with hope.

"Oh, no. I doubt that. I don't know what it is, but it's not a car."

Blake watched Nathan smirk at first, then shake his head in disgust and leave the room.

"Alright then, I'm probably just over excited that the camera made it there. What do you think, buddy? Do you approve of this project or am I getting in too deep?"

With slight hesitation, Travis responded "Well, I'm nervous, but yeah, I approve."

Travis went over and touched The Box. He ran his hand along the outer design. "This is truly incredible, man! You'll be able to see what the world will look like in one hundred years, a thousand years, or actually, see a real dinosaur if you go in the opposite direction."

"Now you sound like my son. The Box doesn't work from that time era. Either way, that's not why I've made this. All I want is my wife back. Once I accomplish that, I'm not going to use it anymore."

"That's a load a crap and you know it. You're going to get addicted."

Blake knew Travis was right but didn't want to admit it.

Travis continued when there was no response. "Let me see if I have this right. When you use this thing, you can only transport to a date and time at the same location. You can't go to, say, Hawaii in 1902, or England in the year 2050. The Box can only appear at this exact spot at any given time. Right?"

"Yes, it's a time machine, Travis. Not a vehicle."

"Well, what if you travel a million years in the past and this location, at that time, was under water. Does that mean you'll drown?"

"Yes. But again, I'm only going to transport ten years ago, March 19th, at three P.M, give or take a few minutes. I'm not going prehistoric, or futuristic."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," Travis replied. "And how do you get back?"

"The Box goes with me. I can either send just what's in The Box like I've been doing with the cameras, or the whole Box and contents. If I just send what's in The Box, that can't come back because there won't be a Box after it's transported. But if The Box goes too, then it can get back as well."

"And what if you see yourself from that time? Doesn't that disrupt the timeline?"

Blake couldn't get mad at his friend for all the questions. After all, he had to be just as worried as Nathan.

"That's only in the movies. I'm sure it'll be fine, but just to be safe, I'll stay away from myself."

"What if you transport with a fly in there with you? Will you merge like in that movie?"

Now Blake was becoming irritated and didn't answer the question – mainly because he didn't know for sure, but also because the questions

were becoming more and more ridiculous. "Look, I'll have everything planned out. No need to worry."

"Okay, Buddy. I know I wouldn't have the balls to try what you're about to try."

"If you lost someone you loved as much as I loved my wife, you'd understand a bit better why I'm doing this."

"I guess so. What's there left to do?"

"I've tested it numerous times. That video we just watched was the first time the camera transported successfully. I just wanted your opinion as to what you thought we saw and heard. What I think is the camera was transported facing the sky, so I didn't know for sure where or when it went. Since then, I tried it three dozen times, and each attempt was successful." Blake brought up the video from the latest transport.

"Wow, that's pretty cool! You gained a few pounds since then," Travis said, tapping Blake's stomach.

They both watched the video of the ten-year-younger Blake looking directly into the camera, then placing it on a workbench."

"Funny thing is I now remember that incident when it happened back then. I remember not knowing where it came from and asked Sally about it. She said she had never seen it before, too. I didn't think about the incident since then because I probably took the camera back when I came to this timeline again, so I probably forgot all about it."

"Well, if you remember picking up the camera ten years ago and didn't know where it came from, yes, your time machine is going to work, or you wouldn't have remembered that. But then you've got to ask yourself - why isn't your wife still alive? If this is a success, wouldn't the future have already prevented her from her death? Are we in the same loop right now? Is there a future you and me or are we as far in the timeline as possible?"

Blake frowned. "I could have screwed up and was unsuccessful then."

"Well, why try again? Isn't it going to have the same results in an endless loop? Will the 'old us' be discussing this same situation in ten years?"

Blake scratched his head. All of this was starting to get confusing. "Possibly. But I can leave notes for myself this time."

"Who's to say you didn't do that last time? Do you remember any strange notes?"

"Come on already," Blake yelled, "I have to try something!"

"What if you said that ten years ago?" Blake didn't respond, and Travis quit talking. He knew when to shut up.

Blake transported another camera. They watched in anticipation. It was another success. The Blake from ten years ago looked directly into the camera for a few seconds and then placed it on his workbench. The screen went blank from when Blake, at that time, switched it off.

"How many cameras are on your desk at this point in time?"

"One, of course. I'm sending it back to the same moment. If I sent a second one a minute later, even a second later, there'd be more. I don't remember finding more than one camera, so I have to be careful and precise. I don't want to screw anything up."

"Fair enough, but you don't remember any notes?"

"No."

"Hey, let's send a camera one thousand years into the future. See what the world is like!"

"How many times do I have to repeat myself? I'm not doing that. I only made this for one purpose - to stop my wife from dying, and that's it!"

Travis frowned. "But how's it going to hurt anything?" Travis waited quite a while for a response. Blake wasn't budging.

"Sorry. So now what? If you stop your wife from dying, then that'll change the current timeline, won't it? Will we have even met? You did meet me because of your wife's death, you know."

"Since time travel doesn't exist yet, I have no idea what to expect. Life may continue the same, just with Sally in it."

"But I only met you because of Sally's death. You were depressed in a bar, and that's when we met each other."

"Dude, shut up," Blake said. Travis was asking too many questions. He saw the look on Travis's face. "I have no idea, but I have to try this."

Travis got up, ready to leave, and Blake gave his friend a hug. "Sorry about before. I didn't mean to get snippy. I just don't know what's going to come out of all this. I'm afraid, but I have to do this. We can let what we see in the movies ruin it for us, or we can just go with the flow. All this crap where the time traveler sees himself and things start to disappear from his life is fiction. It never really happened, so no one knows for sure. If I see myself from ten years ago, maybe we can go out for a drink and everything will be fine. It will just be another me with no side effects."

"I guess so. I'm starting not to like this."

"Things will be fine," Blake said reassuringly. "I think the big day will be tomorrow. Are you going to be here when I leave for the past?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. I'm worried about Nathan, too. He's pretty upset about this whole thing."

"He'll be fine. When he gets his mother back, we'll all be a happy family again."

"And what, his mom will just pop back into this world?"

Blake once again looked at Travis with the 'shut up' facial expression. "No, Travis, it'll be like it never happened. I think. I hope."

Blake gave him a firm handshake and a big hug again. When the door closed behind him, Blake sat there and thought about what he was about to do. *If I'm able to save my wife, should I even bother coming back to this time? Why not just stay there and continue my life as if nothing happened? Will I still be ten years older? Will The Box still remain since it hasn't been invented in that time yet? Will I be stranded?* He sent another camera and received the same positive results. "I'm coming for you, hun. I miss you."

CHAPTER 3

While Blake waited for Travis, he kept sending more cameras into the past. Buying them at a bulk rate discount was a great idea. So far more than twenty cameras were transported, but at that time, it was just one. Each attempt was a success. He tried other objects as well, just to be sure his device wasn't accustomed to only cameras. He even transported a rodent with a tiny camera strapped to its back. Something alive and with a heartbeat. The rodent scurried across the floor and entered a hole in the wall when the camera went blank.

Without knocking, Travis walked in and sat next to Blake. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Blake just nodded. He didn't look like he was sure.

"What can we expect? After you zap out of here, how long will it take you to be back? When should we expect The Box and you to return?"

"It should be immediate. I'll go back in time, save my wife, and pop back at this exact moment. If all works the way it should, what you should see is The Box disappear and then reappear within a second or two, no matter how much time I spend in the past. That's hard to wrap your head around, isn't it?"

"You ain't kidding," Travis said. He walked over to The Box looked it over, not knowing a defect even if he saw one. "So even if you spend five years there, it'll seem as if it's only seconds here."

"You got it," Blake said, slightly amazed at the logic of the scenario. "I can choose any date and time I want to come back, so I'll just come back at the same moment I left."

"I hope we'll still be friends. You'll know who I am when you get back, right? How will your wife get back?"

"Dude, I know this is a hard concept to grasp. Pay attention. Since I'm going to save her, she'd already be here."

"Why come back? If you can stop your wife from dying, why return here at all? Why not just live your life just as it is?"

"I've already thought about that. Please don't make this any more confusing than it already is. I don't know. Something is telling me I have to do it that way."

Another voice was heard at the front door, followed by a knock.

"In here, Nathan," shouted Blake.

Nathan walked into the room with red eyes from all the crying he was doing on his way over.

"I'll be back before you even know it." Blake inspected The Box one last time, hugged Nathan and fist-bumped Travis. He stepped inside The Box, programmed the date with shaky fingers, put his hand on the lever, ready to pull down.

"Are you ready?" Blake asked.

"No," responded Travis and Nathan simultaneously.

"Neither am I." Blake pulled the handle down. In an instant, The Box and Blake vanished.

"Uh oh," Blake said when he finally opened his eyes. The Box was toppled over, slightly crushed, and too high up on a hill to reach. Blake must have fell out of The Box and rolled down this steep hill. The home he lived in ten years ago wasn't here, but this certainly isn't ten years ago.

"Oh no."

Blake was flat on his back, in pain, and was staring up at the purple-tinted sky. The fog was making it difficult to breathe.

"Oh no. No!"

Blake tried to crawl to The Box, but it seemed that more than just his arm was busted. He cried out in pain. Even if he could get to it, he couldn't possibly stand it upright. The hill was uneven. *Where the hell am I? When the hell am I?* He called out for anyone, or at this point, anything.

He was in a daze and kept losing focus. His vision blurred. That familiar whirring sound was heard traveling towards him, followed by voices. Although he couldn't make out what they were saying, he knew it was English and human. He felt a hand reach down and grab his arm. A warm, soothing hand. The pain vanished everywhere the hand touched. Then he felt as if he was floating. Yeah, there wasn't anything underneath him, but he felt himself gliding on air. *What the hell is going on?* When he was securely inside a contraption, Blake passed out.