

# Time Twist

A prologue

Roger Chappell

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ISBN: 9798455693236 (Paperback)

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This paperback edition first published in 2021

*Cover Design by Olivia Williamson*

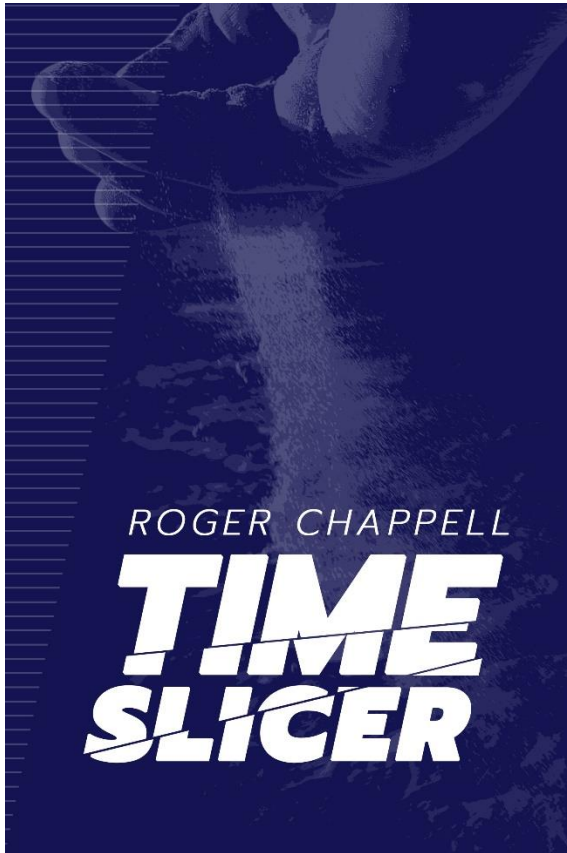
Published by Roger Chappell & Media Two

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A prologue to the novel 'Time Slicer'



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Thank you to Olivia Williamson  
for the cover design and taking on  
the fun job of editing.



## **Chapter one**

### **July 1, 2021**

Phillipa Harris stood at the table they had set up, nervously scratching her arm. She was alone in her lab, and the silence helped calm her a little as she stared, trance-like at the device in front of her. That evening was going to be the most important evening of her life. She knew what she was planning was a risk, but it was now or never, and she was tired of waiting, when this one device could change everything.

The device, not much larger than a book, was sitting on the long, sheet-covered table in the middle of her physics lab. It had consumed the last five years of her life and was surprisingly small considering what it did, but it needed to be portable. Phillipa continued to stare at it, caught up in the moment, a moment that she felt could last forever if she could just let it. The late afternoon light that crept in through the window had reached it, giving it a magical orange glow. It sat there waiting, posing in the sun's final rays as if it were just another ordinary device.

Phillipa was snapped out of her trance by a wave of nausea that came from nowhere, or more likely from her pregnancy. She walked back to her desk and steadied herself as she sat down. She was about to go over her checklist again when her assistant, Arjun, burst through the door with a train of words in an excited Indian accent.

"Slow - down - Arjun."

"Sorry, Boss." He took a breath and started again.

"The TV show. 6 pm, they confirmed it!" Arjun was pacing around the lab in excitement. "It's on; you're going to be famous!" He finally found a chair and rolled towards Phillipa's immaculately tidy desk.

Phillipa was a perfectionist. She believed a tidy environment led to a clear mind and fewer mistakes. Her desk and her whole lab reflected this.

Her work for the last five years was all about space-time and a theory of quantum gravity. The theory suggested space-time has a foam-like structure, full of microscopic wormholes. She'd found a way to enlarge any one of those wormholes and send particles through to any other point in time, proving the theory. She'd succeeded in sending matter through time and finally had a small enough device to do it with.

While the device itself was now bug free, it still required a large amount of power delivered fast and steadily. But every test over the last few months with the updated supply Arjun had built had worked as expected. Finally, they were ready to reveal the full extent of their work.

Arjun's grin faded as he noticed Phillipa's discomfort. "Are you okay boss? Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you bursting in like that, but I just saw the email—"

"No, it's okay Arj—just a little nausea. I'll be fine. But yeah, great that the TV will be here too. No pressure at all." She instantly regretted the sarcasm, knowing how excited Arj was. He was so dedicated to it—the perfect assistant.

"No, I mean it, Arj, it will be fun, lots of champagne! I hope—"

"No no no boss, you can't drink," Arjun said, wagging his finger at her, "no champagne for you!"

It had been difficult for her to completely give up the occasional drink, especially since losing her husband. It had been five years since he went missing, but now, she was carrying his baby.

"I'll just have a sip," she assured him, "right, time to get ready then. I'm heading home to freshen up, and I'll see you back here around five-fifty?"

"No Problem. See you then!"



He closed the door behind her, paused for a second, still facing the door, then turned and stood looking at the room. He breathed a long, loud sigh and headed over to the device.

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Phillipa's home welcomed her with warmth and music, thanks to her smart devices. The decor was minimalist, except for the books which seemed to end up all over the house. Books kept her company, or tried to, but there was a loneliness they couldn't mask, just as and there was a coldness the heating didn't touch, and the country music did little to mask the quietness that echoed from the walls.

She went straight to the kitchen, eyed the bottle of wine that stared back at her, then turned and went for the coffee machine. After spending ages choosing dinner from the freezer, she placed it in the microwave and listened to Glen Campbell sing about being a highwayman as she waited. She ate at the kitchen counter with only her thoughts for company. Thoughts of how far they'd come with their project and how she missed her husband more now than ever. But if tonight was a success, all that could change in an instant.

**5:45 pm July 1, 2021**

The university which was home to Phillipa's lab was buzzing with excitement. The TV crew was setting up, and Arjun was running around helping them. A white sheet covered the time travel device, space had been cleared around the table it sat on, and a few rows of white fold-up chairs were

arranged in a semi-circle around it. A small crowd of university professors, benefactors and other interested parties were mingling.

Arjun checked his watch, then looked around for Phillipa to find her approaching him.

"You look great," Arjun said, "are you ready for your big moment?"

"Of course, I hope you've managed to compose yourself; remember, we've done this many times."

"Except this time, it's with an audience." He took a deep breath, "let's begin."

They made their way to the spot marked on the floor, about 3 metres in front of the table. The chatter in the room faded off, and people began taking seats.

The TV personality, A young woman in her late twenties, approached them.

"Hi, I'm Sarah Collins. I'll be running this story. I have the info Arjun sent over, you're Professor Phillipa Harris, and this is your Assistant Arjun Miller? I think we're okay to start if you're both ready?" She asked.

"We are, and we are," Phillipa replied, giving Arjun a hint of a smile.

Sarah turned to a camera, waited for a nod from her producer, then began to speak:

"Tonight, I am told history is about to be made. We're at the University of Riverton, in the physics lab of Professor Phillipa Harris and her assistant Arjun Miller. They claim they have achieved what—until now—was thought impossible. They say they have managed to send matter either forward or backwards in time. I'll let that sink in for a few seconds."

She turned to Phillipa, "Professor Harris, I understand that you have been working on this for quite some time now?"

"Yes, I have dedicated the last five years of my life to developing a portable device to prove my theory and send an object back in time." Phillipa sounded a little nervous.

"And," interrupted Sarah, "is this what we will see demonstrated here tonight? I understand that you have been sending atoms back and forth in time?"

"Ah, yes, however, we have progressed," Phillipa replied. "What we'll show tonight is the same test you have read about, but with a much larger object. If all goes to plan, you'll see a duplicate of what we send back, appearing *before* it's sent."

"How much larger?"

"Well, I was hoping we could use your handbag."

Sarah laughed, unprepared for the suggestion. "Really? Well, if it helps science—" She motioned to her producer for her bag, "—then I don't see why not."

Handing her bag on to Phillipa, she smiled, "You *will* look after it, right?"

"Of course," Phillipa replied, walking to the front of the table, "I'll have it on me the whole time."

"Er—" began Sarah.

Arjun cut in, "Phillipa, I don't think—"

The crowd was silent as Sarah cut him off.

"So are you saying that you, yourself, will be the test object? With my bag?"

"If you have no objections?" she asked, but she didn't wait for a reply as she turned to address the gathering. "So, let's say 'hello' to 'future me' sent back to about now!"

Phillipa checked the time on her wrist and made a mental note of it.

There was silence, then some murmuring from the guests. Arjun raised a finger and was about to say something to Phillipa but stopped when a floating blue sphere of light appeared. It was no larger than a marble, shimmering energetically just behind the table.

The room fell silent, and the sphere suddenly grew to about two metres in height and became more transparent, with just the thin outer surface glowing electrically blue. In the centre stood Phillipa, or rather a copy of her, because the Phillipa who just spoke was still standing next to Sarah. The sphere faded, and then it was gone.

Second Phillipa looked around at everyone, enjoying their stunned faces. She was holding a metal box with what looked to be a small iPad on top connected to it by cables, and dangling from it was a short lead with a round flat plug on the end.

"Hello Sarah, I believe this is your bag?" Second Phillipa asked. She was grinning as she walked around to the front of the table, holding it out to Sarah.

Sara's jaw had dropped, and the room was still silent. She looked from the original Phillipa to the new one and back a few times. "I—"she began, then composed herself. "I have to admit, I am shocked. I see two Phillipas, and two bags." She glanced at the camera as she took her bag from second Phillipa and began checking the contents.

"This IS my bag," she announced.

The first Phillipa held out the bag she was holding, "and this one?"

Sarah put the bag down and looked at the one she had given to Phillipa just a minute ago.

"Well, I just handed it to you, so—" she examined the contents, "indeed it is. It's identical, they're—" she was becoming lost for words.

"Okay," interrupted the second Phillipa, "let me explain what just happened. I sent myself back in time, from a few moments from now," She motioned to her other self, "and you're about to see me do exactly that."

The first Phillipa, bag on shoulder, walked around the table and uncovered the device as Arjun joined her, and they checked settings on the tablet screen connected to the metal box under it. The same device that the second Phillipa was still holding, except this one was still hooked up to the large power supply under the table.

Arjun nodded to Phillipa and moved away to the end of the table. Second Phillipa joined him and leaned in to whisper to him.

"Something very strange happened as I was sending myself back. I thought the whole test was about to fail, but then I arrived in the past. We'll discuss it later, but it's something that needs to be analysed. Everything is being recorded, right?"

Arjun was tense; beads of sweat had appeared on his forehead. He replied without looking at her. "Yes boss, all events and data now being logged as requested."

She gave him the thumbs-up sign and re-joined Sarah at the front of the table.

Original Phillipa reached under the table and flipped a switch. She uncovered and picked up the device, unlocked the tablet, and ran the app.

"I am now entering the destination time of 6:11 pm on today's date. You will notice that's about 3 minutes ago, when the other me appeared. The

tablet will now perform the calculations required, store and set time signatures to apply, and when it's ready, a 'GO' button will become active. When I tap it, you will briefly see the blue flash of a sphere surrounding me. I'll appear to vanish, but I'll actually just stop travelling forward in time with you. I'll have escaped the flow of time and be stopped at one point in reality, hidden outside of time."

Phillipa looked around to see if she had lost anyone. Everyone's gaze was fixed on her, except for Arjun, who now fidgeted uncomfortably. She continued, her voice now a little shaky.

"Then a gap, a wormhole, will be enlarged around me, which will instantly transfer me to the point in reality which matches 6:11 pm. The loop will be complete, and my counterpart there – future me – will be the only one of me remaining in the room."

The room was still silent in anticipation.

Phillipa found her hands trembling slightly as she studied the screen. They had tested on mice before, with never any adverse effects. But this was her first test on herself, and she'd reasoned that it had to happen sometime, so why not now, and really 'wow' everyone. Her last memory of her husband Thomas smiling at her flashed through her mind as she stared at the tablet. She re-checked the settings one last time before she gently touched the 'GO' button.

Instantly, a blue, glowing sphere engulfed her. Inside the sphere, Phillipa stared at the tablet, and a look of worry spread over her face. She looked up at Arjun, and back at the device, and a second later, she vanished. Then she suddenly re-appeared still in the sphere, and as she did, a third Phillipa emerged, also holding a device and stepped away from her, still in the bubble, which was now growing larger. Third Phillipa was wearing different clothing, and her face was somehow slightly different. Second Phillipa had started briskly walking over to Arjun but was now moving in slow-motion. Several people in the room stood up, and Arjun started to panic. He was trying to go over to Phillipa but kept retreating, knowing he could not enter the sphere.

The original Phillipa looked up at something from within the sphere in slow motion, terrified. Another figure began to faintly appear in the sphere and third Phillipa started to say something, but no sound came, as if she was muted. The two Phillipas in the still growing bubble looked at each other in shock. The First Phillipa then unplugged the power cable to the device. As she did, there was a loud BANG from under the table, followed by a column of smoke. The sphere vanished, and with it, the two Phillipas and the other figure inside. At the same instant, second Philippa, who was now frozen mid-step on her way to Arjun, also vanished, leaving a silent room except for a hiss from the power supply as more smoke escaped.

## Chapter Two

### Twenty-three years later

Orange leaves crunched under Isaac's feet as he zipped his jacket up higher against the wind. He checked his wrist. *Not late yet!* he thought. He was usually late for something, this time it was dinner at home. He'd been in town with some university friends, and as usual, lost track of time. Dinner was at 6, it was 5:44, and it took about 25 minutes to walk home. It's not that his aunt would be annoyed that bothered him, but that Isaac would be annoyed with himself. Sometimes he'd swear less time had passed that actually had, and felt he'd lost five or ten minutes somehow.

He ran several blocks then rechecked his watch. *'That should do it'* he thought. He walked the rest of the dusk-coloured streets, occasionally being lit by a passing car.

Isaac had grown up in Riverton, a university town. He'd excelled at school, despite finding it mostly boring. Now at university, he was starting to take his future seriously. His aunt Susan had always told him he was capable of whatever he put his mind to, and so far, she was right.

He rounded the last corner, reached his house, and opened the door at precisely 6 pm. "Ha!" he said out loud to no one. He took a deep breath and went through.

Inside, Isaac was greeted by the aroma of dinner and country music coming from the kitchen. His aunt was busy placing bowls of food on the table.

"Just in time!" She announced as she sat down at the table.

Isaac brought water over, filled two glasses, then sat down opposite her.

"How was your day?" She asked, glancing up at him while placing spoonfuls of mashed potato on her plate. Susan asked him this every day, and



he usually had a lot to tell her, but some days, when he had too much to think about, he didn't feel like answering. He found talking to people in general was an uncomfortable interruption.

"Meh. You?" Isaac replied while filling his plate.

"I managed to get some work done between the drop-outs, and I even had time for gardening."

"Internet still dropping out then? When's that going to get fixed?" Isaac asked casually, not caring for the answer.

Drop-outs didn't bother him much now; he had one of the new phones, with Quantum storage and Graphene Super-Capacitor battery tech. This meant he could use 'Google Now', a new app that predicts what information you might want in the future by analysing your browsing and app usage habits and pre-downloading and storing the data locally on your device. The idea was to help free up bandwidth bottlenecks during peak usage times. A must-have time saver for uni students.

"This week sometime, I expect," she motioned to the box on the floor with the large Starlink logo on it. "I received the replacement dish today, so now we just need to wait for it to be installed, which reminds me, a package arrived for you too."

Isaac looked up from his food, "for me? Who's it from?" He asked as he tried to think of something he may have ordered online. "I didn't order anything lately."

"I didn't look, I just put it in your room."

Isaac set his phone down and enjoyed the rest of his dinner before heading up to his room. It was a huge room, and he'd had it all his life. The house was built in the early 1900s when people thought they needed massive bedrooms.

He flicked the light on and grabbed the package from his desk. It was a box about the size of a cake tin. He was about to take it downstairs when he checked the sender. It was a law firm. He paused and decided it might be better to open it there in private. *Why would a law firm be sending me anything?* He wondered, trying to think if he might have done something he could be sued for lately. He began to open it, then stopped. *What if it's bad news?* He pondered. *Maybe I should leave it for tomorrow, and just enjoy the evening.*

He had plans to meet up with Chel tonight to study, and he didn't want to ruin that, so he set the box back down on his desk and pulled his phone from his pocket. Ignoring the list of notifications, he opened the chat app and messaged Chel.

*'Still ok for tonite?'* he tapped.

Chel's reply came quickly: *'Yep, but can I come to yours? I need to get out'*

*'Sure, see you soon?'*

*'About 30, still doing dinner :('*

Isaac smiled, knowing why she added a sad face.

He had met Chel at university. He'd noticed her around the science labs, and he later found out her father worked there. She was attractive, but he wasn't one to make 'first contact' with girls. The first time they spoke, he was in the library reading a book, and she just sat down opposite him, took one look at his book and stated, "Well, you're wasting your time!"

Isaac had ignored her at first, annoyed at being spoken to by a stranger. She didn't let him off that easily, though.

"Hey, I'm talking to you, that book you're reading, it's rubbish. String theory is too flawed. Books on it should be re-classified as fiction."

He looked up at her and studied her face. She looked serious, so he decided to annoy her.

"It's okay, I'm a flat earther," he lied.

"No, you're not," she countered.

"Aren't I?"

"Nope. If you were, you'd be funny looking. Every flat-earther is funny looking, but you're cute looking, ergo, not a flat-earther."

And it was somewhere between Isaac feeling his face flush with embarrassment, and getting lunch with Chel that day, that he decided he wanted her as a friend. Three years later, and they were more than just friends.

He sent her another message:

*'How's your pizza?'*

She replied with an angry face emoji.

He stuffed his phone in his pocket before heading downstairs to join his aunt, who was catching up on her YouTube subscriptions on TV.

"Chel's coming over."

"Okay. Don't the Millers go out for pizza on Wednesdays?"

"Yeah, usually, but her dad decided he wanted to cook tonight, which she's a little annoyed about," Isaac grinned, "being the pizza lover she is."

"Well, I know I'd rather have his chicken korma over pizza any day," Susan answered.

"Yeah, he should put *it* on a pizza," Isaac suggested.

Susan stood up and headed for the kitchen, "Now that is a brilliant idea. Coffee?"

"No thanks, I've got some beers to share with Chel."

"Oooh, romantic!" She teased him, "would you like me to sprinkle rose petals on the floor?"

"Yes! Please do. And make sure the candles are lit before she arrives."

"Yeah, okay, how about you do all that while I drink my coffee and watch?" Susan smiled.

She made her coffee and settled back on the couch to her YouTube. Isaac joined her there, staring at his phone. He cancelled all the notifications without reading any and idly lost himself in Instagram while he waited. Thirty-five minutes flew by before there was a knock at the door. He jumped up and let Chel in.

Chel greeted Susan while Isaac grabbed beers from the fridge, and they headed up to study.

Isaac's desk was an old dining table, which was perfect for two people to study at, spread books out and still have room for snacks.

"Snacks!" Isaac announced, "be right back!"

He raced downstairs as Chel got comfortable at the desk and opened a bottle. She was pouring two glasses when she noticed the box that had arrived from the law firm. She examined it, shook it, and set it back down. She took a sip as Isaac returned with a bowl of chips.

"What's with the box?" She asked, gesturing to it with her glass.

"No idea, it arrived today from some law firm, but I didn't feel like opening it yet."

"I'll open it!" She said, grabbing it and ripping at the tape.

Isaac remained quiet as she opened the box. Inside was a letter, and in bubble wrap, a metallic device resembling an old computer hard drive, and some cables.

Isaac read the letter out loud:

"Dear Isaac—that's me," he said, trying to be amusing.

"Please find enclosed an inheritance item as instructed by your Mother Phillipa Harris, on June 15, 2021, to be delivered to you after your 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. We apologise for the lateness of the delivery. We wish you well, blah blah blah."

"That's nice," Isaac said, "but what the hell is it?"

It had USB sockets on it and a three-pin power socket which one of the cables with a strange disk-plug end fit. Another cable was an ultra-thick USB to USB. One of the sockets was marked with the word 'phone'. On the side was a power switch. He pulled out his phone and connected it to the device using the USB cable, then flipped the switch. His phone popped up a warning about high power drain, which he dismissed; his phone could handle anything. Another notification appeared, asking him if he wanted to install the 'S-T app'. He tapped OK, and the install began.

"Geeze, it says 'two minutes remaining'. That's one huge app."

He noticed Chel's confused expression.

"My mother was a physicist, remember? So this is probably a log of all her work or something that she wanted me to have to continue in her footsteps with. It does kind of look like an old hard drive."

He set it down, and they sipped beer as they waited. After what seemed like longer than two minutes, the screen activated with the message of the install being completed. Isaac picked it up, holding the attached device behind it, and tapped the 'Open' button.

The screen changed to pale blue, and in red, the words:

## **Gravity Space-Time**

### **Flux Modulation**

**V. 28a**

**May 2021**

Then it went blank for a second before the word 'CALCULATING' appeared. After a few seconds, it displayed the current date and time with the seconds counting up and 'SIGNATURE READY TO RECORD' under it.

Under that was a live circular static pattern with rapidly changing numbers circling it. And under that was the heading 'DESTINATION'. There was already a time and date set there, being 23/6/2021, 17:30:00.

Isaac tried to alter the date, but the field was disabled. Under it was the word 'CALCULATING' alternating between white and red. After several seconds, it was replaced with a green 'READY', and a new button appeared that simply said 'GO'.

He showed Chel to get her opinion.

"What does that do?" She asked cautiously, noticing Isaac's serious expression.

Isaac's heart was beating hard now. He had an idea what this was. He recalled reading that his mother had worked on quantum theories of space-time wormholes. He didn't believe her work ever came to anything before she died, but a part of him was screaming, 'what if...?'

He grinned at Chel, "It's a time machine!" he half-joked, "wanna see me travel in time?"

"Yeah, right," Chel said, "go ahead. Go forward to the end of the semester and get all the exam answers for me." Usually, she would have been smiling at the suggestion, but Isaac, the risk-taker, suddenly looked serious.

He held his finger over his phone with the device under it now humming slightly. He looked up at Chel, feeling the device getting warmer and his heart beating faster, feeling the moment.

He bit his bottom lip and tapped 'Go'.

## **Chapter three**

### **June 23, 2021**

Everything around Isaac froze and was tinted blue. He stepped back a few steps as a white vertical line appeared in mid-air in front of him. It grew wider and rapidly began to envelop him. His jaw dropped, eyes wide open. If he wasn't so awe-struck, he might have been scared. Suddenly, the whiteness receded to just a line again and then it was gone. The blue tinge dissipated, and he was left standing in his room, holding the device. Chel was gone, and the late afternoon sun struggled to stream in through gaps in the closed curtains.

"What the..." he trailed off.

He looked at the device. The destination date and time were now at the top under 'Current date/time'.

"No..." he whispered. He slowly left his room and crept downstairs. The whole house was different. He reached the kitchen, which now looked old fashioned. There was a smell of coffee, and music was coming from some device on the counter. His heart was still pounding when he heard a voice behind him.

"Who the hell are you!"

Isaac spun around but couldn't speak. He instantly recognised her from old photos. They stood staring at each other when she noticed the device in his hand.

"Where did you get that?" She said, using a baseball bat to point at the device.

"Uh, wait," Isaac began nervously, "uh-are you Phillipa Harris? I'm Isaac Harris...and I think I'm your son." He was talking fast now, in a higher pitch, unable to hide his fear.



"I was just up in my room...and I got this today from some law firm so I hooked it up and it had an app and I ran it and pressed go...and there was a white flash and then everything changed and I think I just travelled to the past!"

Phillipa slowly took the device from him, pulled out a chair and sat down. She examined it and found the engraved code on the back. She went to her wall safe, opened it and pulled out an identical device, and found the same code on it.

"Well, well. It worked. What year is it?"

Isaac sat down. "Mum?"

"Yes. It seems that you are my future son. And I planned for you to get here. Your name's Isaac?"

Isaac's shoulders dropped as he took a deep breath and nodded with half a smile. Phillipa swapped the bat for a bottle of wine from the kitchen and motioned to Isaac to have a seat. Neither spoke as she poured a glass from the other side of the island counter and offered him one, which he gladly accepted. She took a sip, staring at him intently while thinking.

She started smiling.

"I had a son! It looks like you turned out okay. What year is it for you?" She asked again.

"2044? My aunt Susan raised me in this house since I was four."

Phillipa's smile faded. "This means one thing: I die."

There was an awkward silence before Isaac asked what had been on his mind since opening the package.

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"You arranged to have this device sent to me, but why?"

"In one week, we demonstrate the device publicly. Not this one,"—She motioned to the one Isaac brought with him—"another one, at the lab. For the first time, I plan on testing it on myself. I haven't told my assistant because he'd probably talk me out of it. He's 'Mr Safety'. But I need to do it; I'm tired of waiting."

Phillipa took a sip of wine before continuing.

"I take risks, but I plan for all eventualities. So I thought, in case anything goes wrong, I'll arrange to have this copy sent to you or my sister—your aunt Susan—when you're older."

Isaac thought for a second, "But, why? Why send it to me?"

"Because, Isaac," She leaned in, speaking softly now. Tears started to burn her eyes as she looked into what could have been his father's eyes. "I wanted to make sure I got a chance to know you."

Isaac smiled and took a sip from his glass, trying to hide his own tears. Phillipa went to where he was sitting and motioned for a hug. Isaac stood up and felt like he was about to cry as the realisation that he was with his mum again hit him. He hugged her for a long time.

"You look just like your photos," he said, wiping away a tear. "I feel like I'm in some dream."

Phillipa smiled back, "and you have your dad's eyes."

"Wait," Isaac said, composing himself, "you said this means you die, which I know you did; you died when I was four, so is that me in there?" He asked, motioning to her bump.

"I assume so, I have already named him Isaac, and he is due in November."

"November 15, 2021," he said, reciting his birth date. "So.... can we now *prevent* your death?"

"Maybe," she said thoughtfully. "But we'd need to know how and when I died exactly. And in doing so, we'd create a paradox which would cause space-time to twist to compensate."

"Hmm, I was never told the exact details of your death," Isaac said dejectedly. "Twist?"

"If we save my life, it will create an alternate timeline, then you'll never receive the device in this timeline and come back to help save my life. If it works, then the fact that you're here now means the two realities twisted at some point in the future to allow both events to happen despite each other. I need to do more research on that side of things".

"Wild," breathed Isaac, now relaxed and enjoying being there. "You have to tell me – how does the device work exactly?"

Phillipa lit up excitedly, "I'm glad you asked! Okay, reality, or space-time, has and always will exist. Its structure is like foam, and made of infinite slices, where every second of time covers millions of those slices. Time behaves like a 'flux' around life, so we don't stick at one slice but instead, flow *through* reality and experience time."

Isaac slowly sat down again, fascinated.

"My device," Phillipa continued, "produces a bubble of anti-time by *reversing* the time-flux field around you, causing you to slip out of time's grasp, and you're then experiencing just one single slice of reality."

She was speaking excitedly now, her passion for her work pouring out. "For you, it appears as if time has stopped all around you, but in fact, it's you

who has stopped! To everyone else, you vanished, left behind at a previous slice of reality."

"Like hidden outside of time..." Isaac said.

"Precisely! The device then inflates the nearest hole in the foam—a wormhole—to *outside* of reality itself. However, because the universe can't allow anything outside of reality, you are instantly transported back in if you go through! But here is the fun part: *Where* you re-enter, will be at the slice of reality that matches your *destination* time!"

"Is that the white thing that started small and then went all around me and receded again?" he asked.

"That was an enlarging wormhole."

Isaac looked puzzled, "but how do you end up at the right time, or 'slice'?"

"It's simple: Before you go through, the anti-time bubble adjusts your current time signature to be the one you *would* have if you were in your destination time! So you automatically re-enter at the point that matches the time you set."

"Then the device shuts down, and the bubble collapses. Time flux reverses back to normal, and you're caught up in the flow of time again."

"So to Chel –my girlfriend– I just vanished?"

"Yes," Phillipa smiled at the mention of a girlfriend, realising there was a lot she'd love to hear about from him, "but don't worry, you can easily return to the moment right after you left."

"Of course... Wow. I can't believe you figured all this out. It's.... crazy. But brilliant."

"It was many years of mathematics, experiments and failures. I admit I was a little obsessed. But It was life-changing when I discovered it. "

Phillipa sat down next to Isaac with a sigh.

"I could never use the device outside of the lab because there is nothing small and portable that could perform the calculations fast enough or have the power to handle the device drain. It takes what I assume to be a quantum powered phone from your time?"

"Graphene super-cap battery. Quantum based storage though. That's it! My phone likely downloaded all the university logs and events of the past one hundred years, maybe what happened to you is recorded!"

Isaac disconnected his phone from the device, opened the 'Google Now' app and searched his mother's name.

*'233 Results'*

He searched 'Phillipa Harris Death.'

*'3 Results'*

He glanced up at his mother and tapped the first result.

"Okay, so it says you were killed during a quantum physics demonstration of a space-time manipulation device on July 1, 2021, due to a hardware power surge... blah blah... it says it's believed the power supply was tampered with. ...hah, it mentions Mr Arjun Miller here, Chel's dad. He was your assistant? Wait! This is next week... How is that possible? If you died next week, I wouldn't have been born..."

Phillipa's gaze darted around as she bit her bottom lip, thinking about what he just read. She stopped and looked at Isaac.

"It's possible... fascinating," she whispered.

"How??" Isaac frowned.

Phillipa got up and started pacing.

"What I said before, you would be from a slightly different reality. An alternate universe. One in which the event of next week happened much later. One which was probably created from the demonstration going wrong. It's like whatever happens during the demonstration, sends a ripple through time, creates a duplicate reality at some point, which twists with this one for a while. It's probable, however, that realities would merge again some time afterwards, ones with identical pasts likely could.

"Wild," Isaac said again, "so, what now?"

"Now, we have another drink, order some food and enjoy the evening! I'd love to hear all about you - and then we'll try to figure out a plan. Phillipa's excitement was growing. "We have one week to fix this," she said with determination, "I'm no more prepared for my demonstration failing than I am for my death!"

She topped up their glasses and asked Isaac to bring up everything available on the event of July 1 and the weeks around it.

## **Chapter four**

### **June 28, 2021.**

Three days before the demonstration

Arjun whistled quietly to himself as he drove. The sun glinted rhythmically on his face through the trees lining the streets of Riverton. He reflected on how fortunate he was right now. He worked with a genius scientist and was a major part of a significant breakthrough in manipulating space-time.

He planned to become a physics professor and teach at the university, so working under Phillipa was a fantastic opportunity. He was very protective of what they had achieved together in the last few years. It was their 'baby'. He'd seen too many discoveries bought and used the wrong way, either by the military or private enterprise with more money than sense. He knew it was inevitable, but he didn't have to like it. And who was he to argue?

He parked and made his way briskly to the entrance. Deep in thought, he pulled up the collar of his coat as dry brown leaves swirled around him on the floor of the undercover parking.

Phillipa was signing Isaac in at the reception desk when Arjun reached the elevator. Isaac was wearing a new black suit and holding a briefcase. His hair now slicked back.

"Arjun, I'd like you to meet Mr Jones, the Investor I was telling you about last week."

The elevator doors opened, and they exchanged greetings. Inside, Arjun jabbed at the '3' button as Phillipa continued her Introduction.

"Mr Jones is very interested in our work, and his company might like to license the technology for some exciting projects."

Arjun forced a smile.

"Please call me Henry," began Isaac, "yes, we're excited by your progress, and we feel we can help take it to the next level."

"Really," Arjun stated. He was trying to hide his lack of enthusiasm, but part of him didn't want to.

The doors opened, and they went straight to the lab.

"I'll leave it with you, Arj, to show I—Mr Jones around and explain what we have. Let me know if you need me. We'll chat more over lunch if you like, then I'll be away for the rest of the day."

Phillipa smiled at them both and went to her desk. *Damn it, Phillipa, She thought, you nearly messed that up... not that it would have mattered too much—she reasoned—just because your unborn son is named Isaac doesn't mean the 'investor' can't have the same name.*

Isaac made it back to Phillipa's home later that evening and went through to the kitchen where dinner was being made.

"Well, that was weird —hanging out with a young Mr Miller," he said. "I've had dinner at his house with Chel, his daughter, and it was difficult to keep in mind that he doesn't know me."

"I can imagine," Replied Phillipa, handing Isaac a beer and a glass, "did you find anything out? Did anyone else enter the lab while I was away?"

"Nope, no one came in," Isaac got comfortable at the kitchen island, "but he did seem annoyed with me being there. He didn't want to show the device much at all."

"Really. Interesting. I would've thought he'd be excited to show it off. I know he loves the work and feels very involved. Did you suspect that he was planning to sabotage the device or power supply at all? I know we agreed it's a long shot, but he's the only one that would know *how* to make it fail. As much as I hope it's not true."



"No, nothing." Isaac shrugged. "He even invited me along to watch the demonstration."

He emptied his glass and added "I really don't think he'd do anything malicious; I know him—well, future him, but still, the Mr Miller I know wouldn't hurt a fly. He's kind, generous, and pretty funny."

"Funny eh?" Phillipa asked, amused at the thought. "He's quite brilliant too. His input took us in directions I would never have thought of alone."

They sat in silence while Phillipa sliced some cheese, placed it on a cracker, then popped the whole thing in her mouth.

"Remember," she said, covering her mouth, "he doesn't know I plan on using the device on myself at the demonstration, so it's safe to say he didn't... won't...set out to hurt me. But If it *was* him, I want to know why."

"Okay," Isaac said thoughtfully, "So what do you want to do?"

"That's easy," she grinned.

## Chapter five

### July 1, 2021

"No, it's okay Arj—just a little nausea," Phillipa replied to his concern, "I'll be fine. But yeah, great that the TV will be here too. No pressure at all."

It was the day of the demonstration, and Arj was excited.

"No, I mean it, Arj, it will be fun, lots of champagne! I hope—"

"No no no, you can't drink boss," Arjun shook his finger at her, "no champagne for you!"

"I'll just have a sip," Phillipa assured him, getting ready to leave the lab.

She picked up her bag and headed for the door, "right, let's get ready. I'm heading home to freshen up, and I'll see you back here around five-fifty pm?"

"No Problem. See you then!"

He closed the door behind her, paused for a second, still facing the door, then turned and breathed a long, loud sigh before heading over to where the device sat, still bathed in the late afternoon sun.

Arjun sat on the floor in front of the power supply under the table and removed the front cover. He took some bridging connectors from a container in his lab coat pocket, a gas soldering iron and fine pliers from his other pocket. Sighing, he began soldering a few connectors onto the output circuit board.

"Sorry Boss." he whispered to no one.

He connected his multimeter to several points on the board, then turned the supply on and tested a few other areas while turning the dial on his meter as he did.

He pressed his lips together, replaced the cover, and cleaned up the tools. After covering the device with a white sheet, he arranged chairs in a semi-circle between the table and the large windows and sat watching the sunset and waited for the catering team to arrive.

At 5pm people began to trickle in and chat amongst themselves. At 5:30, the TV crew arrived and began to set up, with help from Arjun.

Phillipa walked up to Arjun as he was checking his watch.

"You look great. Are you ready for your big moment?" he asked.

Isaac arrived and found a seat at the back. He watched as his mum and Arjun walked to the front of the table, and the room went quiet. The TV lady went to them and chatted before starting her monologue:

"Tonight, I am told history is about to be made. We're at the University of Riverton, in the physics lab of Professor Phillipa Harris and her assistant Arjun Miller..."

Isaac stared at Arjun, looking for anything out of the ordinary. He seemed nervous, but that was to be expected. He was on camera, and this was a big deal. Isaac looked around at the other people in the room, scanning for anyone behaving suspiciously. Everyone was quiet and still, listening to his mother speak. He felt proud of her at that moment.

"How much larger?" The TV lady asked.

"Well, I was hoping we could use your purse."

Isaac shivered and shifted in his seat. He suddenly realised he might be about to see his mother's death played out in front of him. His attention

snapped back to the demonstration in time to notice Arjun's demeanour suddenly change: He had started fidgeting, adjusting his tie, scratching his neck.

"Phillipa, I don't think—" Arjun began.

The TV lady cut him off, "so are you saying that you, yourself, will be the test object? With my purse?"

"If you have no objections?" Phillipa replied.

Isaac smiled, his nervousness forgotten. He was looking forward to seeing his mum time travel. Even though he'd already done it himself, he was curious to see how it looked to others from the outside.

Arjun raised a finger just as a blue sphere of light appeared behind the table.

The sphere grew to about two metres in height, flashed white, then faded away. In its place stood a second Phillipa.

Isaac smiled. *That was pretty cool*, he thought, looking around at others in the room. Most people looked shocked. Even the security guards looked quite entertained by what just happened. *We could sell tickets to demonstrations like this*. He thought.

He watched his mother as she walked around the table where she and Arjun checked the screen. Arjun looked concerned. He checked under the table and said something to Phillipa. Phillipa replied and motioned him away to the end of the table.

Phillipa picked up the device, unlocked the screen, and ran the app.

"I am now entering the destination time of 6:11 pm on today's date. You will notice that is about 3 minutes ago, and exactly the time the other me appeared."

Isaac sat up in his seat, not wanting to miss any of what was about to happen. He was a little nervous again now. *What if it wasn't the power supply that was the problem?* he thought.

He forced himself to not think about it.

"Then a gap, a wormhole, will be enlarged around me..." she continued as the room remained silent.

Phillipa checked the settings one last time. She looked up at the audience, then at Arjun. She turned and found Isaacs face at the back of the room, pausing for one last look. She smiled at him before she gently touched the 'GO' button.

Instantly a bluish translucent sphere enveloped her. She was frozen still inside. Then the sphere flashed to white and vanished, taking Phillipa with it. At that instant, Isaac, sitting quietly by himself in the back row, also disappeared.

The lab subtly changed; a few people were now in different seats, and items on benches at the back shifted as the silence erupted in applause, with several people jumping to their feet.

Arjun joined Phillipa next to Sarah, grinning widely as cameras flashed. Sarah waited for the applause to die down before wrapping up with a concluding monologue.

The caterers then uncovered some canapes and began walking around with trays of champagne. After much handshaking with various attendees, Phillipa pulled Arjun aside to chat.

"Arjun, I'm afraid I have a confession to make."

Arjun looked surprised, "*you* have a confession? Does it have anything to do with how you did that without being plugged into the power supply?"

"Yes and no," continued Phillipa, "the investor... Mr Jones? Well, he's not really an investor."

Arjun stared silently.

"He's actually my unborn son Isaac."

Arjun was silent for several more seconds, then stuttered, "W-what?"

"He's my son. From the future."

She proceeded to explain what happened a week ago; Isaac showing up, them finding out she had died during the demonstration, how they had to suspect Arjun because there could be no one else and that she used Isaac's phone instead to prevent the accident.

Arjun went to the nearest chair and sat down.

"I feel sick," he whispered. Phillipa went and got a glass of water from one of the tables.

Arjun sighed, gulped some water, then began to speak. "Phillipa, you know I have the most respect for you. I live for the work we have done together, and I would never, *never* put you in any danger. I never thought you would use yourself in the demonstration."

He took another sip of water and continued, "so I now have a confession for you. I did try to cause it to fail today. After you left this afternoon, I adjusted the power output of the supply so that it would output erratically. That *should* have caused the safety routines to kick in and shut down the whole procedure. But if what you say is true, it seems it might not have happened that way, but instead had some terrible consequences in another timeline. I am very sorry."

"Arjun, Why?" Phillipa was in a bit of shock to hear him confess it, "why did you do it?"

"Well—" he began but was interrupted by his thoughts, eyes wide.

"Wait, this is a paradox!" he said with a look of wonder, "I thought a harmless failure will keep everyone away for now... give us more time to work on the power supply size. I did it because I felt strongly about outside investment, but *you* arranged that, to try to find out what happened! If you'd never sent Isaac, I would never have been motivated to tamper with it. So, Isaac was the cause of your death, AND the reason it was prevented - a temporal causality loop."

"Phillipa shook her head slowly, "This is why time travel is dangerous, especially travel to the past."

"So, where is Isaac now?" Arjun asked, looking around, "I saw him at the back during the demonstration."

Phillipa scanned the room to make sure he was gone, "I believe he too would have vanished when his phone did, as soon as the demonstration succeeded. The reason for him to come back in the first place ceased to exist the moment I didn't die."

Arjun looked sheepish, "I really am sorry, Phillipa. I was reckless."

"You were doing what you believed was right. I can't fault you for that, but in future, talk to me instead, okay?"

She patted his arm, "It's time to celebrate - let's get a drink."

"No no no, you can't drink, boss!" Arjun started wagging his finger, then stopped, "well, maybe just a sip!"

## Chapter six

### May 6, 2044

Chel watched Isaac hold his finger over his phone with the strange device under it now humming slightly. He looked up at her, bit his bottom lip and tapped the screen.

He was engulfed in a blue sphere of electricity for a second before vanishing. At the same time, Chel also disappeared, and the whole room changed slightly.

Downstairs, Isaac suddenly felt dizzy. The room around him started altering. His aunt Susan vanished. Furniture changed or disappeared, and some other pieces appeared. He sat down. Years worth of new memories flooded him, existing alongside the ones he already had.

Then he saw her.

Standing in the kitchen was his mother. Now 23 years older than when he had seen her just one minute ago, yet her appearance was completely familiar.

Phillipa caught him staring, his face white, mouth open.

"You okay?" She asked, "you look like you've seen a ghost."

"Uhh... this is going to sound weird, but I think I saved your life..."

Phillipa suddenly realised what was happening. She cleared her throat.

"You just missed out on some good Canapes," she said knowingly with a grin. She'd planned on saying that line for a long time.

"Mum, it's incredible" —Isaac got up, looking around— "I have two sets of memories now, although the other ones are starting to feel... less real, or old. A minute ago, I was at the lab, at your demonstration... it was 2021."



"I thought that part would be a bit weird for you. I've been waiting 23 years for this day. This moment must be the other end of the time twist, where this timeline became tangled with the other, the one in which I died. Although I'm surprised you have both sets of memories intact, I'm sure you should only have one from the timeline that took over. Maybe you have some weird natural connection to time..."

"Can someone please tell me what's going on?" Chel asked timidly from the couch.

They spent the evening with pizza—at Chel's request—and revealed the entire story to her. Phillipa retrieved the device from her safe to show Chel. Chel was dubious at first, suspecting a prank, but it was replaced with amazement after a couple of hours. Phillipa also explained what happened after Isaac vanished from the lab, including Arjun's confession and the whole paradox of the events.

"Mum?" Isaac asked, "what drove you to invent the time travel device in the first place?"

"Your father," Phillipa answered, "him going missing is what motivated me all those years. I had to know what happened. I wanted to go back and save him somehow. But, unfortunately, it has always meant a one-way trip because of the power supply issue. Two of me running around for five years wouldn't work, so without a portable high-capacity power supply, it simply wasn't an option."

Isaac bit his bottom lip and started to smile. He picked up his phone and held it up.

"Until now, that is..." he said, grinning.

Phillipa grinned back, looking from Isaac to Chel and back again.

"Did I ever mention the exact date he went missing?" She asked, also biting her lip, as Isaac plugged in his phone and powered up the device.

**The story continues...**

...in the full-length part two novel: '**Time slicer**'.

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