

The sirens started howling. The sky lit up with aircraft lights as the Germans attacked. A bombing. Men and women screamed for their children to hurry up. The dark was terrifying; truthfully, they couldn't see you, but you couldn't see the bombs. I was out playing football with Sam at the time. The moment it started it was unbelievable. The planes soared through the night with deadly silence. They were so hard to detect that they were almost above the city when they were eventually spotted. I screamed out and ran. I had to leave my football behind because I couldn't waste any time. I took a different turn to Sam and hurtled towards my house. I managed to take a quick glance upwards only to see a squadron of six bombers flying overhead, preparing to offload their first bomb. I jumped over our gate and flung myself inside the bomb shelter. My mum had already brought in some of our most precious things, like photos of my father and small pieces of jewellery. I was relieved to see my model car was safely inside. Wrinkles whimpered softly at my feet. He becomes frightened easily when this happens. He has to start getting used to it. When I looked over, my mum was glaring at me.

"Why are you so angry?" I asked. I knew the answer already.

"You. You scare me to death. Staying out late and not being here when they arrive."

"I don't know when they come. I had no warning," I complained.

"I don't care!" my mum shouted above the din of the bombs. I crawled to the side of the room and sat myself down. I was cross but I knew she was right and I loved her really. But I wanted to be with Sam.

"Sorry. I'll try to be here," I said. It was quiet against the surrounding sound but I knew she'd heard me. She turned her head towards me. Her deep blue eyes pierced my heart. I was angry with myself.

"Try to get some sleep. You'll need energy for school tomorrow. Just one more day before the weekend," she said. I watched her rest her head against the wall and close her eyes. I curled myself up into a ball to keep warm and slept.

But I didn't sleep for long. I woke up after about three hours. It happens every time. After the fighter planes have flown away I wake up. I'm not sure why, but I believe it could be because I'm nervous. I don't know where the bombs have landed. This time, I was restless. I didn't try to fight it. Instead, I sat up and stretched because my back was aching. My mum was still sleeping peacefully, and Wrinkles was curled up next to the sleeping mat. I was shivering. I moved next to him and cuddled his warm, furry body. He licked my hand and grunted in satisfaction. Once again my mind wandered towards the bombings. In particular, I started thinking about Sam. I am always scared. I was almost certain that he was all right but of course there was a really small chance that one had hit him. But while there was that small chance, there had to be doubt in my mind. It could be him. It could be anybody.

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I woke up late the next morning. I barely had time to put on clothes and eat some bread before scrambling out of the door. I took the long route to school as usual. That way I could find out whether any bombs had landed nearby. I reckoned that I could just get to school in time if I ran. I sprinted my way past Sam's house and half a dozen others that I knew. All unharmed. I arrived at school just in time to start. I noticed that our teacher, Madam Frill, wasn't there. A new teacher that I had never seen before was covering her. To start off, she explained that Madam Frill had been caught in the explosion of a bomb. She hadn't been seriously injured but she did need to stay in hospital for a bit. She was expected back on Tuesday, but with a swifter recovery she might even be available for Monday. We did nothing all day. We talked about last night. The teacher had lots of stories about the war. It would have been interesting, but Bonter ruined it. He's the class show-off and bully. He is short and tubby, with red-ruddy cheeks. He lives in a grand house that he boasts about. He constantly laughs about other people's misfortune. He came out with stupid comments like "Nobody around here got hit. The Germans have got a rubbish aim," and I was tempted to say: "But one time they won't miss and your house will be destroyed. Wouldn't that be funny!" but I didn't. I knew I'd get into too much trouble. Teachers were good at being harsh to me. So instead I deliberately interrupted when he was trying to speak. When school ended, I was first out of the doors. However, Bonter rushed ahead of me to get to his personal cab driver. I tried to trip him up but failed. He glowered at me, spat, and told me to buggery off. I laughed at him, told him he was fat and walked away. I should have waited for Sam; I was so annoyed with Bonter that I forgot to. I decided to meet him at his house. I turned left and was flattened as I ran headlong into my friend Mr Wine. With his beaming face looking down on me, I couldn't help but smile weakly.

"Hello, Mr. Wine," I said.

"Good day at school?" he asked cheerfully.

"Dreadful day; Bonter was being stupid. Joking about the bombs last night and stuff. You weren't near one, were you? I didn't have time this morning to check your house," I replied.

"Not me, no. We were quite lucky last night. They didn't target our area. But if Bonter gives you any more trouble, inside or outside school, just walk away."

"I just did," I said.

"Good man Felix," he called out so that everyone could hear. He likes to make a fuss over me. He ruffled my hair and sauntered on, humming softly to himself. I started moving as well but turned around to watch him go. Such a friendly man he is, always wearing a bowler hat and holding a dark cane. His smile is always a reason to cheer me up. I hope that in time to come, he will be remembered honourably by the whole village ...

This time I could afford to lie in because it was a Saturday. I didn't have to collect our rations until later that morning. So I lay for a while in bed, thinking about my dad. He works for the air force, so he would probably be doing the same things to their cities as the Germans were doing to ours. I don't know any of Churchill's tactics but it seemed to me a blatantly obvious thing to do. I got up soon afterwards anyway to take Wrinkles for a walk. My clock said 9:30, which allowed me half an hour to walk the dog. I pulled on some scruffy clothes and went downstairs. My mum was already up working in the kitchen, cleaning the floor. She looked bright and breezy after a good night's sleep. She called out to me as I went, but I didn't hear her clearly. It was most likely something about breakfast but we didn't have much food left. I would wait until we got our food and then eat a better breakfast. One good thing about having just mum and me was we could eat more; it didn't have to be shared around lots of people. Also, my mum's a good cook so I never feel hard-done-by at meal times.

I saw the Parkeeper as I walked through the park. It was a chilly morning and the wind bit my ears. I had to get back and Wrinkles wasn't enjoying himself. He only likes walks if they are in good weather. I dropped him home before heading to the ration shop. When I arrived there was only a short queue. Bonter was first in line (as usual), then Bill Dairy the farmer, and finally the Parkeeper. I joined after him and Mr Wine got there soon after. We were only a couple of minutes early (though I suspect Bonter had been waiting impatiently for over ten minutes) so I spoke to the Parkeeper about how well the flowers were doing. When it started off, the queue moved briskly. Then, when it came to the Parkeeper's turn, there was a big delay.

"I saw you last night as I ran for cover. You were still out in the park. You've got to get to shelter. It's dangerous," said Geoffrey, the rations man. He frowned uneasily.

"It's none of your business. I can do what I like," retorted Harry, the Parkeeper. "Now, I would appreciate it if you would give me my rations so I can get back."

"I'm not going to until you promise to get under shelter," explained Geoffrey.

"I won't promise you anything. Give me my food!" shouted Harry. He made a jump for it but Geoffrey held it back. Then the Parkeeper lost it. He swore vigorously at him and flung punches but came off worse. Geoffrey was a stockier man and held his ground. He managed to get away with his food but his lip was bleeding, his cheek was bruised and he had two black eyes. Geoffrey appeared to have come out unscathed apart from his temper, which had flared. I was worried about the Parkeeper, so I asked Mr Wine if he would deliver our rations to my house. Then I noticed Sam, who had had the same idea. So Mr Wine agreed to both of us and we ran after Harry. The bright sun was high above the frosty ground. As I entered the park, I realised how beautiful it was. Small butterflies landed on the shiny leaves and the faint sound of a stream could be heard. Plants were dripping; as the water ran off them, their dazzling colours were revealed. As we raced on I caught sight of him turning a corner muttering to himself. We followed but couldn't spot him anywhere. His heavy breathing gave him away. I didn't want to approach too quickly so we watched from behind a hedge. He was sitting under a summerhouse. He was wiping sweat from his grimy forehead with a handkerchief. He was talking softly to himself. Sam was puzzled. He wanted to walk out. But I convinced him not to. I'm so glad I did.

He proceeded to take out something small and shiny from his pocket. It was only the size of a small wallet, but it looked very valuable. It was easy to see from our position. It had gold lining and had writing engraved in it that read:

Open. Discover.
But do not meddle with Time.

He then pulled a stone out of the floor and took out a glass sphere. It had a small slot in the top. It shone magnificently. It said the same thing as the smaller part. He put the first part into the glass and the whole thing glowed white hot. The Parkeeper stood back and Sam hid his eyes. I was too entranced to move. Then it suddenly crackled away to reveal two steel balls, linked with a thin wire of blue electricity. I had never seen anything like it. The whole thing buzzed with energy. I was too amazed to speak. Unfortunately, Sam was not.

“What the heck is that?” he blurted out as loud as a foghorn.

“Shut up!” I hissed with a look of dismay creeping over my face. He had spotted us and was glaring in our direction. He started to walk towards us.

I had never felt so scared. I was on the point of bursting. He crept slowly towards us in his green jacket. I couldn't think what to do. We had just seen something extremely secretive and he knew we had. I just ran out in front of him.

“It's us, Harry, we just came to see if you were alright but then we saw you doing something with those objects and I know we shouldn't have watched but it was too intriguing and amazing, and I'm very sorry so please don't be angry with us!” I stammered, speaking way too quickly and getting my words all mixed up. The Parkeeper looked at me and frowned.

“Why ever would you think that I would be angry?” he said.

“Well, that *thing* looks really interesting and it's probably secret,” Sam added. At this the Parkeeper chuckled deeply.

“Can I trust you?” he said in a very serious tone of voice.

“Yes,” we said in unison.

“Come on then,” he said. He started moving towards the house. I froze. But Sam followed him. I wasn't about to miss out, so I joined them. The Parkeeper encouraged us in; he sat us down and started talking.

“Just to check, you're Felix and Sam, correct?”

“Yeh,” I replied.

“Good. I see so many people nowadays it's hard to remember them all. But you don't want to hear about that. I need to tell you both about this. And me,” he started. “I'll start at the beginning. Please don't interrupt me. Ask questions at the end. I am not from your time. I live in the year 2212. In the future, I am a very intelligent man and I believe that if the war had never occurred then the future would be a better place. So when I found this a couple of years ago, I decided to test my theory. I knew that I couldn't barge straight in and stop the war from happening. I had to discover what life was like this year. When the rationing moment happened, I was certain it needed changing. This contraption is an electromagnetic time machine. It allows me to travel from one year to another in either direction. Time travel is a very dangerous thing. You can't meddle with time. If anybody sees you, something will change. You can't be seen, heard or found out. If you are, the machine will be destroyed and the future changed completely. You won't be able to get back. That's why I have these.”

He reached into his pocket and brought out some more things. "These are hearing pads, iris cameras and mesmerizers. I can explain what they do later. But now I need to use this. My mission is to stop the war from ever happening," he said.

"How?" I asked.

"I've got to show you, not tell you. I want you to copy me. I reckon that you could help me." He placed each hand on a ball. We both copied him and my whole body tingled with static electricity. He took a deep breath.

"1933," he breathed. The machine started shaking violently and heating up but before I could burn myself my eyes glazed over. With a giant crack we vanished. The morning air filled with dust.

I opened my eyes. I was lying next to Sam on a muddy floor. My head hurt badly but I was conscious. Sam was getting up gradually as well. Standing up over us was Harry. He was beaming down and offering his hand to me. I took it gratefully; I felt in no position to be walking. But somehow I tried and succeeded. He talked to us as we went. We travelled over the fields. We had hearing pads and iris cams strapped to us. The pads made our hearing extra-sensitive but the cameras were really high-tech. They were small glass lenses put into your eye that could take pictures and see easily at night. I found out we had landed about two miles from Berlin, our destination. Hitler lived in Berlin but our aim was not to kill him. The Parkeeper felt that he could be a good man. If we could alter his thoughts using the mesmerizer, we would be able to stop him declaring war. The Jews would become his friends, not his enemies. His charisma could be used to improve the world. The route beyond the fields was fairly simple. Dense woodland stretched around us. The light had faded completely. We walked for half an hour before stopping rather abruptly. The trees were parting. Above us stood the city of Berlin. Millions of people and historic paintings lay before us. We were not allowed to see any of it. But we knew it was there. We set down camp and Harry told us his plan before we slept. I settled down easily. But my dreams were corrupted with three questions. Would I ever see my family? Did my mum know where we were at this moment? Was she worried about how long I'd been away?

We all woke up early the next morning. We hoped to be in Berlin before most people woke up.

“Won’t our mums be worried about us?” I asked over breakfast.

“No! In the world were we have come from, the whole universe stands still. A day here is a single second there. That’s another good point. We have to be swift with our work here otherwise the future will move on and be changed again,” said the Parkeeper.

“One more thing. How did the machine know you wanted to travel to Germany? You only said the year.”

“Well, the machine knows me so well that it can read my thoughts. All I have to do is call out the year and the time machine will do the rest.”

“Is there any chance that Felix and I won’t get back?” asked Sam.

“Yes, but don’t be so negative. I am an expert at stealth because I’ve had plenty of practice.” Our conversation stopped there. By then we were approaching the middle of Berlin. Hitler’s headquarters were drawing near, where he was staying at the time. He had only recently been voted into power so not much security had been installed yet. Only a couple of bodyguards, in fact. Harry was extremely confident; in the future, leaders of state had much more security including thumbprint scan, eye scan, voice tone scan and many more. But in the future ordinary civilians are allowed to see you, I reminded him. Sam laughed at this but I thought that it was deadly truthful. We wove our way through Berlin. And before we knew it we were there. Early-morning risers were waking. But the bodyguards had fallen asleep. The mistake cost them dearly. I knocked on his door as the plan began to unfold. I hid while footsteps rustled on the other side. Adolf Hitler walked out way too quickly which enabled Sam and me to trip him up. Before he hit the ground, Harry caught him deftly and, as quick as a flash, gagged him, blindfolded him and bound him tightly. I knew we were meant to be working with speed but he had cat-like reflexes. Sam helped him carry the squirming body inside while I shut the door. I glanced at my watch. We had achieved it in less than fifteen seconds. I was truly stunned. I knew we didn’t have long. Hitler was due to make an influential speech in less than twenty minutes’ time to declare war on Poland, resulting in the start of World War Two. Sam and I held him still and whipped off the blindfold. This would have meant catastrophe if the Parkeeper hadn’t been holding the mesmerizer. His eyes flickered for a moment before resting on the equipment. His striking features took me by surprise; I had never seen him before, only heard rumours. The slick parting, dark eyes and bushy moustache were quite funny. Harry spoke to him. His mind took in every word and idea. Then we left him looking slightly dazed. It was really easy. I was just praying it had worked. We all were.

We were sitting on top of the tallest building outside the square. A large crowd was gathering round a raised stage. There were about two thousand people packed tightly. It was due to start. Suddenly impressive trumpet fanfares sounded loud above people’s chatter and the Germans’ leader took to the stage. The trumpets called once more for silence. The audience waited in expectation. He talked for a while about how pleased he was to be voted in, and then he stopped.

“With me as your leader, Germany will become a great country. I will befriend other nations as our allies. Together we will be stronger than on our own!” With that, he finished to loud applause and cheering, which we joined in with. After all, history had just been changed for the better. Truthfully, we did not know where change would lead us, but we had played our part. As the Parkeeper assembled the parts of the time machine, none of us could hide our obvious pleasure and relief. Before us, it was ready. We stood close.

“1942” he breathed. The balls started vibrating and heating up. My eyes glazed over. And with a giant crack, we vanished. The morning air was filled with dust.

As we returned, the landing was a lot more sustainable. The first time, I had been knocked out for a while because of the impact. This time I hit the floor with a huge bump and stayed conscious. It still hurt lots because we were landing on a stone floor.

“Go and find out what’s going on!” laughed the Parkeeper. “Meet me back here in ten minutes.” I wasn’t about to waste any time. I rushed off towards my house. On the way, I noticed small changes, like houses where there had been rubble, and the rations shop had gone. I bumped into Mr Wine on the way. I didn’t stop, but I did see him carrying unusually large quantities of food. As I turned the last corner an incredible sight met my eyes. Lots of people were dancing, drinking wine, eating nibbles and there was a small band playing folk music. Many of the people were supposedly dead. I went up to a lady I didn’t recognise.

“Why are we celebrating?” I said.

“Oh! Haven’t you heard? Germany’s Führer, Hitler, has decided to link forces with us in an attempt to get rid of world poverty. It’s wonderful news!” she cried.

“That sounds great,” I said and carried on going. Then I saw someone I did know. I spotted him through the crowd. Tears began to well up in my eyes but I forced them back. I ran and hugged him tightly and wouldn’t let go. He was still here. There had been no war to fight in. I whispered that I loved him in his ear. It was my dad.

Then I dashed off. My dad didn’t know why I was so emotional. Also, I could see them later. I had promised to be back. I had only been six minutes but I didn’t care. I was out of breath when I got there. I slowed to a walking pace. I was first back; there were no other footprints going back in. I assumed the Parkeeper had stayed in the park but I wasn’t entirely sure. As I got closer I started speeding up again. I strode in but there was nobody there. I waited for a couple of minutes. Still no sign of him. I was about to go looking when something caught my eye. It was a scrap of paper in the corner where we had travelled. I went over and read it through. I read it again, and again. It read:

Hello.

Yeh, it’s me the Parkeeper. I had to go. I don’t belong here. I had to see my own family. I probably won’t see you again. But I’ll remember you always.

From the future,

Harry

P.S. You could always take up parkeeping as they’ll need a replacement. It’s a decent wage and the park’s a beautiful place to work. And take these to remind you of what you have changed.

By the side of the letter were two bullet cases.