

Time Boy

A science fiction story by

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(Note: This story was written in Jacksonville, Arkansas, in 1999. Some may see similarities in theme to the later movie "Clockstoppers," but this is entirely coincidental. The plot, characters, and technology are entirely different, as any astute reader will see.)

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Epilogue

The Day The Clock Stopped

When the silence began suddenly, Clint stared at the clock. *That can't be right*, he thought. The second hand had stopped moving. He looked around the classroom. Nobody was moving. Every other student in the class – and the teacher – was absolutely still. One girl, Jamie, was halfway between her desk and Mrs. Gibson's desk, her completed test in her left hand, her pen in her right. One of Jamie's feet was off the ground; she was in the middle of taking a step.

Clint whispered, "Oh my God..." He continued to stare around the room. Everyone was frozen in place, as if time had stopped.

Time had stopped.

Ron had one finger stuck in his eye. Mark was bent double over his desktop, his face only inches from the paper. Kristie was leaning backward slightly, her eyes closed. Erick had his right hand near his head, as if he had been in the middle of scratching it. Carla had a novel open in front of her; she had been one of the first ones to hand in her test. Other students were in the middle of other various activities, all frozen.

Well, thought Clint, *I guess that's what I wished for.*

He had been less than halfway through his American History exam when he had noticed the clock. The class period had almost been over. He knew he couldn't afford another C or D on this test, not with the way his grades had been going all year. This was his senior year, and he needed a great ending, grade-wise, if he wanted to go to college. Any college. In fact, if he didn't pull up his grades in American History and Psychology, he wasn't even going to graduate.

After looking around the room one more time, he shrugged, and pulled out his textbook. After a moment, he found the page he was looking for. His test question read, "FDIC. What does it stand for, and what piece of legislation brought about its existence? (short answer)" Quickly, he wrote, "Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Banking Act of 1933."

Question after question, he answered as quickly as he could, not knowing how long the clock would be stopped. Flipping through his history book, he found most of the answers. There were a few answers that he couldn't find, and he was starting to get frustrated. Then he remembered that Mrs. Gibson had said some of the questions would come from class lectures, not the textbook.

Damn!

Quickly, he glanced around. No one was moving. The second hand on the classroom's clock was still immobile. He slipped a piece of notebook paper out of his folder, and hurriedly scribbled down, "#14, #16, #22, #37, #41, #50 & #54."

After another glance around the room, he slipped out of his desk and tiptoed up to Mrs. Gibson's desk. It didn't take him too long to locate the answer key. Mrs. Gibson had been in the middle of grading Carla's test, and the answer key was right next to it. Clint was beginning to sweat profusely, knowing that the clock could start at any time. As fast as he could, he wrote down the answers that he was missing, and returned to his seat.

The clock hadn't started moving yet. *Surely, it couldn't have stopped just because I wanted it to...* He copied the stolen answers down onto his answer sheet, then put his textbook back under his desk, and slid his cheat sheet into his folder.

He started to get up and take his test to Mrs. Gibson's desk, then thought better of it. *If that clock starts moving again, and my test miraculously appears on her desk, there'll be some embarrassing questions.* He sat back down, and tried to assume the position that he had been in when it stopped. *Okay, I was staring at the clock. My pen was in this hand. I was leaning slightly forward. At least, I think that's right.*

He took a deep breath, and wiped the perspiration off his forehead. And waited. He waited a while longer. Nothing happened.

I've gotta go to the pisser. How long is this going to take?

Finally, Clint shrugged, and got up out of his chair, leaving his test, answer sheet, and pen on top of his desk. After one more look around the room, he strolled down the aisle, out the door, and down the hall, looking over his shoulder two or three times. He took care of business, noting that the flush handle of the urinal didn't work, and returned to class. Still, nothing had moved.

Something's wrong now, he thought. How long is this going to take? I'm gonna be hungry in another few minutes. Besides, I'm getting bored.

He stared up at the wall. Suddenly, he grinned. *There's that fly that's been buzzing around all hour.* He looked at the fly. It was about four feet above his head, two feet to his left, and just hanging in mid-air. Standing up, he looked at the insect closely. Its wings were spread out, and stuck in place. *That's fucking weird,* he thought. *The damn thing is just hanging in the air.*

He reached out, and took the fly between two fingers. It didn't resist. He looked at the winged insect for a minute or two, turning it repeatedly in his hand. Then he grinned mischievously. He walked up to Mrs. Gibson and carefully placed the fly on the end of her nose. When he let go, it didn't fall. It didn't move at all. Laughing to himself, he returned to his seat.

After what seemed like half an hour of just staring around, Clint began to get angry. He began to wonder if time had stopped forever. *How the hell am I going to eat? What about that party tomorrow night? Am I going to be stuck in this fucking twilight zone until I starve?*

Finally, he got an idea. He stood up again, and left the room. Down the hall he went, past the other classrooms, past the restroom, and through the double glass doors, into the dining commons. *Why can't they just call it a fucking cafeteria?* He walked through the rows of tables, and over to the kitchen.

Entering the kitchen area, he noted that the cooks and servers were motionless as well. The kitchen clock read the same as the one in Mrs. Gibson's room. He began to wonder if time had stopped all over the world. *Has the whole damn planet stopped turning?*

He walked around behind the serving counter, and grabbed a bread roll out of the bin. It didn't feel hot or cold. In fact, it felt completely neutral in temperature. He found a butter knife in the silverware bin, and spread some margarine onto the roll. Just for curiosity's sake, he didn't put the knife down. He just let go of it. Just as he thought, the knife didn't clatter to the floor. It remained in mid-air, exactly where he left it. *That'll shake 'em up,* he grinned.

He took a bite of the roll. Interestingly enough, the bread in his mouth seemed to be hot enough. It surprised him so much, he almost spit it out, but controlled himself just in time. After chewing and swallowing, he took another bite. That bite was warm, too. He held the remainder of the roll against his face. It still felt lukewarm.

Maybe since my body is the only thing for which time still exists, then the roll only experiences time inside my body. Clint hadn't studied enough to know that heat is a matter of energy released over a certain time period, so he couldn't know that with time stopped, nothing would experience any temperature to speak of.

After eating the rest of the roll, he decided to roam around for a while. He wondered in to the principal's office. Mr. Hollis, his principal, was sitting behind his desk, looking stern. In front of him was the chronic troublemaker, Johnny Conn. Johnny was looking smug.

Clint grinned mischievously again, and walked over to Johnny. He reached into the inner breast pocket of Johnny's leather jacket, and felt around. Sure enough, there was his roll of cash. He pulled out the roll, surprised to see only fifty dollars or so. He took twenty dollars' worth, replaced the roll, and left the office.

Going back toward his classroom by a different hallway, he noticed Melissa Miller. She was in mid-stride, reaching for a classroom door. *Must've just come back from the bathroom,* Clint thought. He stopped and admired her for a second. *What a babe! I wish I she'd just give me the time of day... Wait a minute...*

He walked up to her, and waved his hand in front of her eyes. No reaction. Looking down her exposed cleavage, he smiled. *Now that's a classic pair of tits.* After a moment's hesitation, he slid his hand into her shirt, inside her skimpy bra, and around her breast. Feeling its perfect softness and roundness, he inhaled deeply. After a slight touch of her perfect nipple, he removed his hand. *Just think what I could do, right now. Wouldn't be right, though, would it? Wouldn't be the same...*

Shaking his head bemusedly, he wondered back to Mrs. Gibson's room and sat down. After a few more minutes, he started thinking. *What was I doing when the clock stopped? After a minute, he slapped his forehead. Jesus Christ! I was staring at the clock and willing it to stop. What if... He resumed his former position, and began staring at the clock.*

He focused on the second hand, and concentrated. *Move, damn it.* He shifted in his seat. *Start moving, you motherfu-* It started moving.

Sound buffeted him from around the room. Sounds he hadn't noticed before. The air conditioner was ridiculously loud. The shuffling of paper, the inhaling and exhaling of other students. A current of air blew across his face. Jamie stepped up to Mrs. Gibson's desk, and slapped her paper down. The sound stung Clint's ears. He could hear Erick's fingers scratching his head.

After a slight jerk, he grabbed his own test, and sauntered up to hand it in.

On his way home that afternoon, Clint's mind was racing. He rolled over the day's events in his mind, trying to figure out what happened. *The God damned clock actually stopped. Fucking time just fucking stopped, right in the middle of the day. And I did it. Didn't I? Maybe someone else on the other side of the world did it. No, because I was still awake. I didn't freeze like the rest. None of them even knew it happened.*

He made up his mind to try it again sometime. Maybe even that night. He would probably have a lot of work waiting on him at the shop. Perhaps he could stop time at work, and get more done. Of course, he wouldn't be paid more; the time clock would stop too. Maybe he could try it the next day; he had that Psychology test coming up.

Cranking up his car's CD player, he sped up a little, heading home.

Johnny Conn was riding his motorcycle, heading for a friend's house. He was cussing. He had gone to the dining commons for lunch, and noticed he was missing some cash. About twenty bucks, if he wasn't mistaken. He had looked around for a second, to see if he had dropped it. He had even asked a few people if they'd seen any money lying around, and shook up a few freshmen, replacing some of his lost money.

Melissa Miller sat quietly in the back of her friend Tammy's car. Her right hand was lightly touching her left breast. It had felt really funny all of a sudden, during her third hour class. She was on her way back from the restroom where she had caught a quick smoke, and all of a sudden, as she reached for the door of her classroom, she'd had a tingling sensation run through her breast. Her nipples had both stiffened, and she'd gotten slightly excited, but the feeling had bothered her all day. She wondered what in the world could have caused such a reaction. She had been alone in the hallway at the time.

2 Realizations

Clint made some interesting discoveries that evening. At work, he found that not only had he stopped time earlier in the day, but that he could do it again, and as many times as he wanted to. Secondly, he found that he didn't have to stop time completely, but that he could just slow it down a little, or a lot. At work, he practiced his newfound skill.

At first, he just waited until no one was looking, and stopped time. Then we would finish whatever job he was working on at the time. After doing that twice, once when rotating the tires on an old Celica, and again when changing the spark plugs on a relatively new Monte Carlo, he realized that it could get suspicious. That's when he found that he could slow time down.

To practice, he held a wrench at eye level. Then he slowed time down as far as he dared without stopping it completely. Next, he let go of the wrench. He watched in fascination as the wrench slowly drifted downward, away from his hand. He followed the lazy dropping movement of the tool until it was near the ground, and snatched it up, letting Time go back to normal speed.

"Good catch!" shouted out his boss, Tommy Jackson, who had just caught the drop out of the corner of his eye.

"Thanks," Clint answered smugly, and returned to work.

"Well, Clint," Tommy said, at the end of the evening, "I think that's the most work I've seen you do in one night in the entire nine months you've worked here. You do look a little strung out though. You sure you're not on anything?"

"Nah," Clint mumbled. "I think I was just thinking about that party tomorrow night. You're still gonna let me go early, right?"

"Hell. If you do half as much tomorrow evening as you did today, you can go. What time you wanna leave?"

"Uh, well, I'd like to get out of here by seven at the latest. That'll give me time to clean up."

"Sure thing, kid. By the way, if you can work like this more often, I'll move your regular raise up a few weeks."

"Thanks."

The next morning, Clint carefully pulled his classic '68 Camaro into a parking spot in front of Watkins High School, and shut off the engine. As he got out, he smiled. Now, he knew that he was superman. He had just experimented with his time-stopping trick when he woke up, to make sure that it wasn't a one-day fluke. He could do anything, as long as he was careful not to be noticed.

"Clint!"

He turned his head to see who was calling. It was Ron, the guy who was throwing the party. "What's up, Ron?" he called back.

Ron was strolling toward him, looking around suspiciously. "Hey, man, you think you can pitch in a little dough to help buy the booze? Mark gave me eight bucks, Erick gave me six. Jamie got her boyfriend to cough up a little. I got a few others say they'll pay me back tonight."

Clint grinned at him. "You know I would, Ron."

"What? Don't tell me you're out. I know you're making good money up there at Tommy's."

"That's not what I meant, Ron. I'll bring my own. And some extra, too."

"Be careful, man," Ron advised. "They're busting minors left and right, nowadays. My brother said he'll get all we need, as long as he gets the money."

"Don't worry." Clint slapped Ron on the shoulder, and headed toward the school building.

After second period, Clint made a point to run into Melissa Miller in the hallway. "Hey, Melissa! What's going on? You going to Ron's party tonight?"

She stopped briefly, looking down her nose at him. "Buzz off, motorhead. If I go, I'll leave when I see you." Then she grinned, condescendingly. "How'd you do on that History test?"

He grinned right back. "Haven't been to History yet. But I feel good about it."

She held up her answer sheet. “That looks like a 96 to me, dumbass. You beat that, and I’ll ride with you to the party.”

“Is that a promise?”

“Sure, motorhead. It’s too late for you to cheat on it. Show me your score at lunch.”

“No fucking way!” Melissa was sitting at her normal table, surrounded by jocks, cheerleaders, and other members of Watkins’ elite. She looked at Clint’s answer sheet for another moment, then looked up at him. “You cheated!”

“Why would I cheat? I had no idea you were going to offer me a prize.” He laughed, easily – almost too easily – almost drunk with his newfound power. “So, what’s it going to be?”

She looked around uneasily at her friends, most of who had already heard her version of their earlier run-in. They were looking at her doubtfully. Finally, she answered, “I don’t really put much stock in promises made to motorheads, but it’s not about you, dick. It’s about me. And I made a promise. Remember, though, horny-man, I never said I was leaving the party with you. I didn’t even say I would hang out with you once we got there.”

“Sounds fair, Melissa. Pick you up at eight?”

“Make it nine. That way you’ll have time to wash the rest of that grease off.”

Her friends tittered at that, and she turned away. Clint merely smiled, satisfied, and headed back to his table. Ron and Mark were sitting there, munching on what was called sliced turkey, but looked and tasted more like roast cardboard.

Ron looked up. “She coming?”

“Yeah. With me.”

“Shit, man,” Erick exclaimed. “How’d you pull that off?”

“Oh, just a little bet she lost,” Clint answered, vaguely. “I’ll be there between nine-thirty and ten. With the booze.” He dug into the roast cardboard on his tray.

For the Psychology test, later in the day, the teacher handed out computerized answer forms, the kind on which you fill in the little bubbles in pencil and the computer grades in just seconds. Clint wasn’t trying to be valedictorian, so he purposely missed three of the fifty questions. A few minutes late, his results were in: he had missed one more by accident, so he got a 92, the highest grade he’d ever had in Psychology.

Melissa was in that class with him. When she saw his grade, and remembered that he had finished a few minutes before her, she raised her eyebrows at him.

On the way out of class, heading toward the parking lot, she sidled up to him. “So, motorhead. Tell me what’s up with all the grades, all of a sudden. I don’t get it.”

He shrugged nonchalantly. “I don’t know. I just looked at my GPA the other day. I’m not going to get into college. I decided to hit the books a little harder – a lot harder. I’ve gotta go to college.”

“Why? No one in your family has. Why should you be any better?”

“Do you have to insult me all the time, Melissa? We’ve known each other for maybe thirteen years. And we were even friends, once, if I remember right.”

She stopped walking. “Look, Clint. We have nothing in common, except that we go to the same school, and we like to get wasted every now and again. My dad’s an investment banker and my mom’s a lawyer. Your dad’s out of work, and who knows where your mom is? I’m going to Harvard next year, and I’ll be a doctor in eight. You’ll be working at Tommy’s, fixing my dad’s second car.”

He stepped back, wishing she hadn’t hit below the belt. Then he remembered, and stopped time for a minute or two, figuratively speaking. As soon as he’d composed himself, he let time roll on.

“Look, Melissa, I don’t want to go into all that right now, okay? My dad made some mistakes. One of them was getting with my mom in the first place. Another was getting her pregnant before they were ready. But since then, he’s done some things right. He made sure the courts gave him custody of me. He raised me pretty good. I’ve been working since I was fourteen, and I bought my own car, and fixed it up. And I’m going to do right by my dad, if I can. If I can possibly get into college, I’m going to. I know it won’t be Harvard, Oxford, or Caltech. It might not even be State. I might have to go to a junior college, mainly because I’ve fucked around in school for the last seven or eight years. But I do want to make something of myself. Maybe get a business degree, and run my own garage, someday. Maybe design cars; I don’t know. Just because I didn’t have a step-ladder like you, doesn’t mean I’m not trying.”

Melissa was silent for a moment, then resumed walking, toward her car, just out of the shop. Clint followed her, also quiet, until they arrived at her car. She turned to him. “Maybe you’re right, Clint. We were friends once. You hang around with a dirty, filthy, stupid crowd, and I hang out with smarter, cleaner people. That doesn’t mean we can’t be friends. At least for the rest of the year. And besides, I might break down near your shop some day, and need your help. And you might end up on my operating table someday. We don’t need these petty cliques bothering us then, do we?”

“I guess not. I wasn’t thinking about all that. I was just saying you don’t have to treat me like dirt when we get to the party.”

“Okay, motorhead.” She laughed a little at that as she sat in her car. “Just don’t think you’re getting any of this.” She pointed at her lap. “I’m sure there’ll be someone there you can score with.”

He grinned. “Okay, yuppie bitch. Not that I’d put this poor knob in that rich thing anyway.” He started to turn away, then stopped. “Hey, got a smoke?”

She shook her head. “I’m paying your welfare already.” She tossed him a cigarette.

As soon as the white cylinder left her hand, he went into action. Time slowed. The cigarette arced lazily toward him, turning end over end. Moving slowly himself, he timed the cigarette’s flip just right, and caught the filter in his mouth, letting time return to its normal rate of passage.

He looked up at her. “Just a trick I learned from the po’ folks.” He headed for his Camaro. “See you at nine.”

At eight o’clock, Clint was parking his Camaro in an empty lot a block from Cameron’s Liquor Store, just on the outskirts of Watkins. He had left work at seven, and stopped time as soon as he got home. His dad was sitting in front of the television, smelling of beer, and didn’t even notice Clint walk through. He had taken the longest shower of his life, scrubbing under his fingernails, washing his hair three times, and scrubbing every part of his body thoroughly. Then he had driven at breakneck speed to the nearest mall, where he parked, stopped time, walked in, walked out with an armful of clothes, and driven away.

The clock was still again. Clint, barely eighteen years old, walked into the liquor store, noting the frozen positions of everyone inside. Three trips later, his backseat was full of twelve packs and bottles of liquor. He was about to let time go on, then he changed his mind. One more trip into the store earned him eighty dollars. He had almost gone into the open cash register, but decided against it. The clerk would notice that almost immediately. Instead, he pilfered through the wallets of all six customers and two employees, taking a few dollars from each one. It was just too easy.

Then he headed for the other side of Watkins, where the more expensive houses were. At eight forty-five, he pulled up to the Miller gate. He punched the intercom button on the keypad.

“Who is it?” It was a man’s voice.

“This is Clint Allen. I’m here to pick up Melissa.”

“Please hold.”

After a two-minute pause, the man’s voice came back. “Okay, Clint, come on in. See that your jalopy doesn’t drip oil on the driveway.”

“No problem, sir.” The gate began to open, and Clint pulled slowly into the winding driveway.

He remembered wryly the last time that he’d been in the Miller home. Melissa’s tenth birthday party, it had been. That was the time Mrs. Miller had hung his jacket on the porch, because it smelled like smoke. He almost laughed at the memory. The last few times he’d seen Melissa’s mom, she’d been smoking up a storm. *I guess being a lawyer does that to you.*

He pulled his freshly waxed and polished 1968 Camaro carefully behind Mrs. Miller’s Lexus, bursting with pride at the way his rebuilt 350 cubic inch engine sounded. It was purring like a sabertooth tiger, ready and waiting for prey. As he stepped out, he admired his reflection in the silver side panels. The entire car was silver, polished so bright it looked like a mirror. He had even polished the tires and wheels, and he had driven slowly all the way over, carefully avoiding the dirtier patches of road.

As he got to the door, Mr. Miller opened it for him, still wearing his suit. *Damn, but the fucker’s aged a lot in the last few years.* Clint stepped inside, after making a show of wiping his feet on the outer mat.

“Good evening, Mr. Miller.”

“Hello, Clint. She’s not quite ready yet. Are you sure you don’t want to go on without her? She has her own car, you know.” He glanced out the window set in the front door.

“It’s no problem, sir.” Clint felt the coolness coming from the older man. “As you can see, I’ve gone through a considerable amount of trouble to clean up for her. I wouldn’t want to waste all of that effort.”

“Hmm...” Mr. Miller shrugged noncommittally. “Suit yourself.” He looked down at his feet for a moment, then glanced up at Clint. He looked tired. More than just the fatigue of a day’s hard work, he looked like he was tired of his life. “You know what I think of you, don’t you?” he asked quietly. Clint nodded, looking him in the eye. “Okay. Then we don’t have to go through all the bullshit that I usually do on her first date with anyone.”

He walked toward his study. Clint spoke up. “Sir?” When Mr. Miller turned around, he went on, “Mr. Miller, I’ll take care of her, sir. It’s not often that I have an opportunity like this, and I don’t want to mess it up.”

Mr. Miller smiled, tiredly. “I know that, son.” He looked down at the floor. “You know, I wasn’t always like this?” He met Clint’s eyes.

“Like what, sir?”

Miller smiled, and indicated himself. “Like this. I used to work for a living, too. I was working three jobs when I met Jill.” He looked up at the stairs, and lowered his voice. “I married into money, son. When I was your age, I was dirt poor. I know what it’s like to fight against financial prejudice. That’s why I’m not giving you the load of shit that I give every other grinning young wolf that walks through that door. You get me?”

Clint was a little surprised. “Uh, I think so, sir. Thank you again.”

Miller smiled. “All right, then. Have a good time.” He stepped into his study, and closed the door.

Clint breathed a sigh of relief, and sat carefully on the plush leather sofa in the family room where he had been standing.

A few minutes later, Melissa appeared at the top of the stairs, and he stood up. “Hello, yuppie bitch.”

She smiled, showing perfect teeth. “Hello, motor...” She stopped. “Oh. Wow, Clint, you actually look decent.” She began descending the stairs.

“Got some new clothes today, after work. I hope you like them.”

“I do, I do. Do I look okay?”

“That’s a stupid question, Melissa. You could roll around in the mud, and I’d still think you were gorgeous.”

She rolled her eyes. “What a line. Surely, you can find something wrong with the way I look. I do, all the time.”

He laughed. “Remember, I’m from the other side of the tracks.”

She laughed with him. “Oh yeah. Almost forgot. Well, let’s go.”

He opened the front door for her, and closed it behind her. As she stepped out onto the front porch, she inhaled sharply. “Wow, Clint. Your car looks nice. Did you clean it up for little ole me?”

“First of all, it’s not an ‘it’. It’s a ‘she’. Second of all, I try to keep her clean all the time. Third of all, she’s more than a car. She’s a classic 1968 Chevrolet Camaro with three hundred and fifty cubic inches of raw power under her hood. Those wheels cost three hundred dollars apiece and the tires cost another two hundred apiece. And that paint job was almost two thousand dollars.”

“Sorry. You know, ever since I agree to ride with you, I’ve kinda been looking forward to riding in it. That’s one thing I miss by not socializing with motorheads. I don’t get to ride in the coolest cars.”

He opened the passenger door for her, and made sure her feet were out of the way before closing the door. Then he got in on the other side. Turning the key carefully – he had recently installed a new ignition, he listened with an expert’s ear to the engine cranking. He pumped the accelerator a few times, then turned to Melissa. “Hear that? That’s something you’ll never hear on a new car. That growl? That roar of anticipation? It’s beautiful.”

“Sure, Clint.” She smiled at him. “Let’s put some tunes on.”

“What kind of music do you like?” Before she could answer, he went on, “Never mind. I wouldn’t like it anyway.” He slid a CD into the slot. “If you don’t like Meatloaf, keep your mouth shut.”

He backed carefully down the driveway, and watched the gate open automatically as the car approached. He pulled onto the road carefully, and eased down the street.

“You’re going a little slow, Clint. Where’s all that ‘raw power’ you were talking about?”

“Hang on.” He pulled slowly to a stop at the corner. “Okay, now we’re far enough away. I didn’t want to leave marks on the road in front of your house.”

As he waited for a car to go by in front of him, he pressed his left foot firmly onto the brake, and began caressing the gas with his right foot. As soon as the other car was past, he shoved his right foot down hard, and released the brake, turning the wheel at the same time.

The front of the car didn’t move much at first, but the rear tires squealed around onto the cross street. A second before the car was pointed directly down the street, he straightened out the steering wheel. The Camaro came alive with a roar, and shot right around the car that had just gone by. Within seconds, she was grumbling softly at seventy miles per hour.

Clint grinned with pride. “Now that’s a car.”

Melissa let out the breath she had been holding. “Wow! That was great.”

Over the next few weeks, Clint learned more and more about his new ability. For one thing, he found that while Time was stopped, his own body didn't need nourishment or sleep. At first, he had gotten hungry, if he kept time stopped too long, but he soon realized that it was only his mind's habit of eating every so often. It was as if his body was burning no energy while time was stopped. He couldn't find a scientific explanation for that, no matter how hard he tried or how much he read. He found that other objects around him could be brought into his little "time bubble." Like that bread roll he had eaten on the first day. He learned how to mentally include certain objects with him. Like his car.

At first, he had been driving in normal time, and stopping time only when he arrived somewhere. He found that he could keep his car running while time was stopped, if he mentally brought the car 'out of time' with him.

He trained himself to control exactly how much he slowed time. For example, he took his dad's pistol out to a deserted area with him. He slowed Time to a crawl. Then he fired the pistol. The normal *bang* of the pistol was slowed to a mild thunder that lasted several seconds to his ears. The bullet exited the barrel visibly. He carried the pistol with him, and walked alongside the bullet as it went along its trajectory. He watched the bullet hit the edge of a tree and change course. Then he watched it finally embedded itself into another tree, and saw the shards of broken bark float away from the tree and land softly on the ground.

He took a stopwatch with him to the track. First, he ran a hundred yards as fast as he could, with Time running as normal. He finished a hundred yards in 13.5 seconds. Then he slowed time just a little and ran it again. This time, he made the hundred-yard dash in only 11 seconds. He slowed it a little more, and ran it in less than ten seconds.

He began to realize that he could set Olympic records with a talent like this. Or he could rob a bank, without ever being seen. He could outrun the police, simply by slowing time, and including his own car in his personal "time bubble." He could receive perfect grades on any test. He could embarrass anyone that he chose. He could do anything but fly.

After Ron's party – at which he had drunk very little – Melissa had asked him to drive her home. They had gotten along very well, although they didn't have their own make-out session like many other students were doing that night. Still, Clint's reputation rose a few points, for having been seen with her. She had done her own thing, but had always returned to his side. The next week at school, he was one of the hot topics. "Did you hear? Clint Allen went to Ron's party with *Melissa Miller*." "Hey, I heard Melissa is slumming with Clint." "Yeah, I saw it. She was all over him." "Oh yeah. I heard she left with him. *Somebody* got lucky Friday night."

The only immediate difference in their relationship was a lessening of the coldness. Monday, at noon, when Clint went to lunch, he walked by Melissa's table, as he always had. Except this time, he glanced her way, and nodded. She waved in acknowledgment, much to the consternation of her friends.

Tuesday night, she called his house, just as he was walking in the door. He picked up the phone before his dad could move from his easy chair.

"Hello?"

"Clint?"

"Yeah. That you, Melissa?" He stretched the cord as far as it would go, and grabbed one of his dad's beers out of the fridge.

"Yes. Are you busy?" She sounded confused.

"Not really. I just walked in the door. I worked a little late tonight. Tommy says he's gonna promote me before summer. I'll be the number two guy all summer."

"Oh, well, I guess that's good. You'll need the money for college."

"Yeah. What's on your mind?"

"Oh. Well, I've been thinking, all weekend. You know, about how I've treated you in the past?"

"Really? Imagine that. Melissa Miller thinking about me." He sat on the couch, across from his dad, and opened the beer.

“Yeah.” She giggled a little. “I don’t know what I’m trying to say, Clint... It’s just that, well... I had a great time Friday night, and I guess you’ve changed, and I just didn’t notice it.”

“Or maybe you’ve changed. Maybe now you’re seeing that I’m a person too. That could be it.”

She hesitated. “Maybe. What I wanted to say was... Well, you can sit at my table at lunch, if you want.”

It was his turn to consider his answer. She didn’t know how long he thought about it, because it only seemed like a second to her. “Well, thanks, I’d love to. Unless you want to sit at my table. I think you’d make a more of a favorable impression with my friends than I would with yours. What about that?”

She laughed. “I don’t know, Clint. I get gawked over enough by the jocks I sit with. I don’t know if I could handle the shock of how your friends would react.”

After just a slight pause, Clint said, “So, what are you really saying here? Just so I’m clear. Is there a possibility of something happening between me and you, like all the rumors say, or are you just saying that I’m now cool enough to sit at your table?”

“Clint. Listen to me. All of the above. I’ve got some homework to do before I go to sleep, so I’ve got to get off the phone, but I want you to know that I’m starting to see how empty it is to be ‘cool.’ And that no matter how ‘cool’ I am in high school, it won’t matter one iota when I get to college. But they’re still my friends, okay? See you in the morning?”

“Sure. And maybe catch a movie this weekend?”

“I’ll think about it. Bye.”

“Bye.”

Clint grabbed another beer out of the fridge, and headed for his room. He was almost to his door when he heard his dad’s slurred voice.

“How was work, son?”

“Fine, dad. I’m getting a raise next week, and a promotion before summer.”

“That a young lady you’re talking to?”

“Yeah, dad.”

“She ain’t a whore like your mother is she?”

“No, dad. She’s very nice. Maybe a little too cool for me, though.”

“Too cool for my boy?”

Clint headed back for the living room. “Dad, at my school, there’s all kinds of cliques, you know? There’s the jocks, the cheerleaders, the nerds, the yuppies, the potheads, motorheads, and all kinds of others. Some of them mix a little, but mostly you know where you fit in. I’m a motorhead. She’s a yuppie. My friends and me, we all work on cars, listen to old rock ‘n’ roll, and drink cheap beer. Melissa and her friends are all rich, wear nice clothes, make decent grades, and don’t know a carburetor from a spark plug. But she’s hot. I’ve wanted her for five years.”

“So if she’s so all-fired ‘cool’, why’s she calling you? That must mean something.”

Clint sighed. “Yeah, I think it might. I just don’t know what yet. I’m trying not to get too excited about it. I don’t want to get my hopes up, and set myself up for a big disappointment. Like you taught me.”

“Good boy. Don’t know how many times I got all excited, and thought ‘This girl’s the one’, and then she ripped my fucking heart out. You’re doing right, boy.”

“Thanks dad.” Clint hesitated. He wanted to tell his dad about his new ability. He wanted to explain how he could stop time; maybe even put on his demonstration. But, although he’d always told his dad everything, he didn’t think this would go over too well. Or even be believed.

“Treat her right, son. I mean, don’t let her walk on you like I always did with my women. But don’t walk on her either. You know I was always excessively concerned about not hurting anyone’s feelings, and too afraid of being alone. All that got me was wayfaring whores, and now I’ve ended up alone anyway. Don’t let it happen to you. Okay?”

“I hear you, dad.”

Wednesday, at lunch, Clint took his lunch tray to Melissa’s table, noticing as he made his way over that there were no empty seats. *Might as well see how serious she was about letting me sit there*, he thought grimly. *If someone doesn’t pull up a chair, I’ll just say ‘Hi’ and be on my way.*

Before he got to the table, Melissa waved, looked around the table, and then started scooting her chair. She reached behind her, and grabbed an empty chair from the next table, sliding in next to hers. Clint smiled a tiny, nervous smile, and sat down, looking around the table.

Then she began introducing him to her friends. There was Brad, the slim, trim, and athletic star quarterback of the Watkins High Eagles. He was on his way to State on a football scholarship. There was Vicki, the head cheerleader. There was Roger, a rich kid who had moved in a few years ago, and Robyn, the soon-to-be valedictorian. Clint nodded at each of them in turn.

Brad stuck out his hand. "Welcome to the luckiest day of your life, motorhead."

Clint hesitated, as people at surrounding tables tittered with laughter, then took Brad's hand anyway. "Thanks."

The second the word was uttered, he stopped time. Again, sound stopped, and all motion ceased. He removed his hand from Brad's grasp, and got up from his seat. He walked around the table to where Brad was sitting, and slid Brad's lunch tray closer to the edge of the table, towards Brad's lap. He left the tray off-balance, knowing that when time resumed its normal course, the tray would dump into the young man's lap. He returned to his seat, resumed his former position, grasped Brad's hand, and restarted Time.

Just as he let go of Brad's hand, the tray spilled, dumping the food on Brad's name-brand pants.

"Shit!" Brad jumped up, knocking his chair over. "Look what you did, motherfucker!"

Clint just raised his eyebrows. Before he could accept or deny responsibility, Robyn cut in. "Right, Brad. Clint didn't touch your tray. We all saw you spill it."

Brad stared at her, then swaggered off to the restroom, cussing under his breath.

Melissa turned to Clint. "Don't let him get to you, Clint. In a few days, he'll be your friend, once he realizes that you're with me."

Clint raised his eyebrows even further. "With you?"

She laughed. "If you want."

"Wait a minute. Is this like one of those movies where the cool people pick a freak as a project, to see if they can make him cool?"

"What? Don't be silly. This is about the last two months of high school. Just because we've been in different social groups for four years doesn't mean anything."

"Yeah," Robyn added. "I heard about your recent academic improvements. You could really make something of yourself, Clint. Just hang with us."

Clint almost boiled over. *They still don't get it, do they? They still think they're better than me. I'll show them.* He just smiled and nodded, outwardly, and began eating his food.

Melissa had been right. By the end of the week, Brad had become chummy with Clint, especially when Clint made a small adjustment to Brad's car, eliminating an electrical short. Robyn had offered to help Clint with his studies, if he really wanted to get better grades. Melissa had agreed to go to a movie with him on Friday night. Roger had invited him to a ritzy party on Saturday night. Other people in the nearby "cool" tables had taken to greeting him in the hallways, either with nods or with slight waves.

However, Clint was careful not to ignore his old friends. He still talked to Ron, Mark and the others before and after school, and told them it was all for Melissa. And he was telling the truth as he knew it. Finally, his five-year crush was seeing some realization.

On Thursday evening, in the middle of his shift at work, he made a trip to the mall, with time completely stopped. He walked through the mall, taking a small percentage of money from each person's wallet or purse. If he pulled out a man's wallet, and it only contained ten dollars, he took one. If there was two hundred dollars, he took ten or twenty. After only an hour of his own time, he had over a thousand dollars in cash.

He also picked up about twenty new CDs and a few new outfits. From two different grocery stores, he got four cartons of cigarettes, a few cases of beer, and some food for the house. He filled his Camaro with gas, changed his oil, filters and wipers at no cost.

He returned to work, and finished up, impressing Tommy even more. Before he left, the big black man came over to him. "Clint, you've done it." He showed Clint a piece of paper. "That's what you'll be making here after tomorrow's paycheck." He

clapped him on the shoulder. “When you first started here, you were just a mechanical genius. Now, you’re a hard worker, too. I’ve got a lot of customers who’re asking for you, specifically. In just one week. You keep this up, and my profit’s going to go through the roof. I’ll even be willing to give you some more hours, if you want ‘em. I mean, if it won’t interfere with school.”

“Sure, Tommy. I’ll go full-time, if that’s okay. I still need to help my dad with the mortgage payments on the house. And besides that, I saw some really nice speakers I want to put in my Camaro.” *Good job, he told himself. Let everyone think nothing has changed. Keep your ability to yourself.*

“Thanks, Clint, I really enjoyed it.” Melissa reached across the car, and squeezed his hand. “The movie wasn’t that great, but I enjoyed spending the evening with you.”

He glanced at her for a second, before turning his eyes back to the road. “You’re right about that movie. I would have to say it didn’t quite *suck*, but it’s just that the plots are getting way too predictable.”

“Yeah. And when there’s a *new* plot, the movie doesn’t really make sense, almost like there’s no plot at all.”

“I enjoyed my time with you too, Melissa. Think maybe we ought to do this again sometime?”

“Sure, Clint. But you’re not taking me straight home, are you?”

He raised his eyebrows. “We’ll do whatever you want to do, girl. I’ve been waiting six or seven years just to have one date with you, and I’m not about to end it before I have to.”

“Let’s get something to eat.”

“Again? Wow, Clint, you’ve made a big change in your life. I’m proud of you.” Robyn smiled at him. Their English papers were lying next to each other on the lunch table. Hers had a large, red “A+” scribbled across the cover page; his had an “A”.

“Like I said, I’m just trying to get into college. I’m even thinking of re-taking my entrance exams.”

“Really? Well, they say you always do better the next time around. And if you don’t, they’ll take your first score. By the way, what did you have?”

Clint smiled wryly. “I got a fourteen on my ACT, and a six hundred on the SAT.”

“You took both?”

“Yeah, I guess I figured I couldn’t fuck ‘em both up, but I did.”

“I guess so. Well, better luck next time.”

“You’re really sleeping with her, man?” Ron couldn’t believe it. He looked over at Mark’s truck, where Melissa was standing, dressed in short shorts and a skimpy halter-top. “No way. How in the hell did you pull that off? You find some voodoo love potion or something?”

Clint snorted. “Something like that. I upped my grades, cleaned myself up, and showed her that I could be a gentleman. It’s not as if she loves me, or anything. I think she’s just having that last high school fling before she heads off to Harvard.”

“At least you’re getting yours. Damn! Melissa Miller and Clint Allen; who would’ve believed it. Well, get in your car. Maybe you can get the girl, but your pile of shit can’t beat my baby.” He turned to his ’73 Monte Carlo.

“We’ll see, Ron. You only beat me last time because I was afraid those old tires couldn’t take it. I’ve got these new babies now. Get ready to eat my dust.”

Clint slid into the driver’s seat of his Camaro, and cranked the ignition, closing his eyes just a bit, enjoying the sweet purring sound of his 350. They were parked next to each other on highway 42, a few miles out of town. Mark stood at the side of the road, next to his pickup truck and Melissa.

“You guys ready?” Mark asked, holding a stopwatch. “All right, gentlemen, get ready. You’ve got fourteen point six miles to cover. According to plan, head down to 57, where you’ll go north to 78, back west to 21, south to 42, and back here. Loser coughs up a hundred bucks to the winner. No cheating, either. You know I’ve got a spotter at each corner.”

“All right, let’s do it,” shouted Ron.

“Let’s do it,” Clint agreed.

“On your marks, get set... GO!”

Four rear tires squealed as the two Chevrolets, each with the same sized engine, shot away from the starting line. The Camaro lost traction for a split second, allowing the Monte Carlo the lead. Clint tightened his grip on the steering wheel, his hands inside new racing gloves. His right foot was pressing the accelerator to the floor, and he planned to keep it there for the duration of the race. His left foot hovered over the brake, awaiting the first turn.

When the two cars flew over the last hill before the 57 junction, Clint saw the on-coming car on the hill opposite the intersection. Quickly, his brain told him that it wouldn't be to the intersection before they were. He got in the left lane, edging up on Ron. Apparently, Ron was afraid of the other car; he slowed tremendously before the intersection.

Clint slowed time down to a crawl; not for his car, just for himself. He jammed the brake and whipped the steering wheel to the left, and then back to the right. His Camaro went into a sideways skid, pointing to the left. With the time dilation, he could barely hear the squealing sound of his tires, trying to push the car north, while it was sliding east. They caught the road just as he entered the intersection, and he shot north.

Ron wasn't too far behind, even though he had waited for the on-coming car. Soon, both of them were over a 100 mph. Clint looked down briefly; his speedometer read 130. He would never know just how fast he was really going, since 130 was the ceiling for his speedometer.

Another skidding left turn brought him onto 78, where he blew past a truck that appeared to just be sitting there, but was probably going 70 mph. He was thankful for his new headlights. They weighed less and were much brighter than his old ones, while using less power.

Without taking his eyes from the road, he pushed "play" on his stereo. Suddenly his new speakers kicked in, with the pounding opening guitar riffs of AC/DC's "Thunderstruck." He knew the song was just less than five minutes long. He planned on being finished with the race in less than five minutes.

Mentally, he calculated how far he had gone. He was a third of the way through the course; that meant he had almost ten miles left to go. He looked at his speedometer again. It was still pegged on 130. In his peripheral vision, he could see Ron's headlights in his rearview mirror, about a hundred yards back.

His right foot was going to sleep. He shoved his leg down, making sure he was getting every available horsepower from the darling engine that he had spent so much time hovering over. There wasn't a piece of the engine older than two years, and he had installed every single one. He imagined that he could feel every piston, valve, bolt, nut, belt, fan, wire and hose under his hood. He knew exactly where they all were, where they all went, and what all of them did. He could feel the sweet-smelling gasoline pouring through the lines, feeding his beautiful beast. He felt each individual piston firing, each valve opening, each plug firing, the driveshaft turning. He felt each tread of his tires as they rolled around, barely touching the asphalt before suddenly were thrust back up for another revolution.

Another skidding turn to the left, and he was going south on 21. Ron was further behind, now, and didn't make the turn for another three full seconds. It was a short shot down 21 to 42. Clint slowed a little before making the last turn, then hit full speed again before whipping by Mark and Melissa. "Thunderstruck" was still playing.

He pulled his foot off the accelerator, and popped the transmission into neutral, coasting away from the finish line. It took three full seconds before the speedometer needle came off 130 and began to wind down. Eventually, he had coasted to an almost complete stop. Noting the engine temperature rising, he shifted back to drive, and turned around, heading back to Mark's truck. Ron was already there, having come to a more sudden stop.

Derek was arriving from the first intersection and Ian from the third. James, at the second, and farthest intersection, would be there any minute.

Clint parked his Camaro, and turned it off. He popped the hood, jumped out, and opened it, allowing the cool night breeze to blow over his hard-working engine.

Melissa ran up to him. "That was great! I've never seen anything like it. We could hear you most of the way around the course, especially your turns. I thought I was going to die. And you too." She planted a kiss on his lips. "Congratulations."

Mark was standing behind her. "Damn, boy. That was six minutes, two point four seconds. Melissa says that's almost 150, but I'm not sure."

Clint grinned, stopped time, and reached into his back seat. Finding a pen and paper, he converted 2.4 seconds into 0.04 minutes. Then he converted 6.04 minutes into

0.10067 hours. Then he divided 14.6 by 0.10067. The answer was 145. He put the pen and paper back in the car, smiled back at Mark and Melissa, and restarted time.

“Actually,” he said, “It’s just a hair over 145 mph. I was pegged out at 130, almost the whole way, but I had no idea. Since I slowed down for the turns, I must’ve broken 150 more than once.” His smile got wider. “Damn, but I’m good.”

“Yes, you are,” Melissa squeezed him. She turned to the others. “All right, Ron, cough up the hundred bucks; we’ve got some making out to do.”

As Melissa lay sleeping beside him on his bed, Clint looked down the length of her naked body. *How did I end up with a goddess like her?* he wondered. *And what am I going to do when she goes off to Harvard? Do I wait to see if she invites me to go with her? Or do I invite myself? What if she offers to stay with me? Yeah, right. Like that’ll happen.*

Before lying down to go to sleep, he stopped time, and studied for a while.

What Is A Hero?

“Do you need any money?” said the voice on the telephone.

“No, Mom, we’re doing just fine,” Melissa answered. “Clint’s job is going well, as is his education. Didn’t you get my e-mail?”

“Yes, honey, I received all of them. I’m just worried that you’re not going to make it, and that you’re not going to be... well, happy.”

“Mom, I know you don’t like Clint, but he’s doing just fine. When I married him, it wasn’t so we could live off of the money you and Dad made.”

“Well, you know if you need anything, just let me know, okay? I know some people in Boston.” There was silence on the long distance line for a moment. “Has he decided on a career yet?”

“Mom!” Melissa rolled her eyes. “Don’t worry about us, okay? If you must know, he’s still on course for the computer engineering degree at MIT. He has a 3.9 GPA. I think that makes him 12th in his class. Okay?”

“Okay, dear. I was just curious. Well, I have to run, honey. Don’t forget that your father’s birthday is coming up.”

“Okay, Mom. I love you.”

“Love you too. Bye.”

“I couldn’t tell her, Clint.” Melissa was sitting on her husband’s lap, in their apartment in northwestern Boston.

“Why not, baby? Surely, being a police officer is just as decent as being a computer engineer. And the pay is about the same, unless I happen to design some brand new kind of computer and make a lot of dough.”

“I know, sugar, but it’s more dangerous. I guess I just didn’t want to worry her.”

Clint got a serious look on his face. “Do you really think you’re mother is worried for my safety? Are you sure it isn’t you who’re worried?”

“I guess you’re right.” She leaned over and kissed him. “I am worried, Clint. Cops get shot all the time. I saw on the e-news last week that a cop was accidentally shot by his partner. Are you sure that’s what you want to do?”

He let a moment slip away. “Yes, it is. My grandfather was a kind of cop, working for the government. His dad was a detective, back in Oklahoma. His dad was a cop. All the way back into the nineteenth century. My dad didn’t quite follow the path, but maybe I can. And maybe I can make a difference.”

“You really think so, Clint? How can one man put a stop to all the violence and crime? I know they say it’s all worth it if you just change one life, but is it really? There are millions of criminals in the U.S. alone, and thousands of them happen to be in Boston. I guess I’m not convinced.”

He put his arms all the way around her. “Maybe the arresting of criminals won’t make a whole lot of difference, baby, but cops do other things, too. What if I save a few lives, over the course of a career? Wouldn’t that be worth it? Isn’t that why you’re going to be a doctor? To save lives? Or do you just want the money?”

She grinned, and kissed him, turning her body so that she could press against him. Then with her lips only a breath away from his, she said, “Both, honey. Both. If that’s what you want to do, then do it. I love you, and I’ll support you no matter what. Okay?”

“Okay. Can we go back to the kissing part?”

Bang! Bang! Clint looked at the target. Two holes, near the bull’s eye. It looked like his weeks of practice were paying off. He thought of the rest of the world, not moving, not doing anything. For about two weeks of his own personal time, he had held the world – and indeed all of Time – at rest, while he perfected his shooting. He couldn’t think of a way to pass the academy pistol examination without actually practicing. There would be an officer watching his every move, and another watching the target. Finally, he was satisfied with his improvement, and headed home, driving carefully, to avoid the other cars that were sitting still on the highway.

Just as he was entering Boston itself, he saw an interesting sight, at least to his eyes. There was an armored car sitting in front of a bank. The back doors were open, and a man was stepping down out of the back, holding two bags of money. His right foot was suspended about a foot above the ground. Behind him, in the truck, Clint could

see several dozen more moneybags. *No, I couldn't. It would be too easy. Besides, even if I just took one, someone would get fired.*

* * *

One Year Later:

Clint leaned his head back against the headrest of his patrol car, continuing slowly down the street. On his Heads-Up-Display screen on his windshield, he could see the face and hear the voice of his virtual dispatcher. He had been in the dispatcher's office, and knew that he wasn't seeing the face of a real dispatcher. He had chosen the face and voice of a beautiful young woman from a menu of over a hundred choices. The real person in the office spoke into the mike, then his computer changed the voice and added the face. The program had first been used by the LAPD, where psychologists had found that police officers were more likely to respond to faces and voices of their own choosing. On a computer screen in the middle of his dashboard, there was a detailed map of the city, with a blue dot indicating the location of his patrol car. Green dots showed the positions of other patrol cars and on-foot officers. Each dot that was currently at a crime scene had a glowing red halo around it.

"Gayle", his virtual dispatcher, said, "We have an armed robbery in progress at..." She went on to give the exact location. It was a liquor store, only two blocks away.

"This is car 455," Clint said. "I'm on it."

Time came to a halt. He calmly cruised on up the store, where he saw the getaway car. One young man sat in the driver's seat, looking intently at the front door. Inside, he could see another man, holding a gun at the cashier's face. Apparently, the cashier had tripped the silent alarm on the floor, which sent his security camera feed to the police station's central video monitoring center.

Clint pulled his car into an alleyway on the next street, where it wouldn't be seen suddenly appearing when he restarted time. He got out, and casually walked down the sidewalk toward the liquor store's front door. He looked around, noting which direction each pedestrian was looking, and found a spot on the sidewalk where he could restart time without anyone looking directly at him. Anyone who saw him out of the corner of his or her eye would just assume that he had been there the whole time. He restarted time. But not to full speed.

As he opened the store's door, he heard the getaway driver behind him rev his engine. "Drop your weapon!" he shouted at the gunman. "Do it now." His own weapon was still holstered.

As the gunman started to turn toward him, bringing his gun to bear, Clint slowed time even more. He lunged at the man, catching his gun hand before the barrel was pointed at him. Just as he grabbed the gun, the man pulled the trigger. With time slowed as it was, Clint saw the action, and slowed time to a crawl. He saw the bullet exit the gun barrel, then stopped time completely.

With considerable effort, because of its inertia, he plucked the bullet out of the air, and placed it in his pocket. Then he returned to what he had been doing, and let time crawl on. In terribly exaggerated slow motion, he watched the gunman raise his eyebrows while Clint pulled the gun from his hands, and tossed it to the floor. Before the man could finish reacting to that, Clint had slapped handcuffs on him. He let time resume its normal pace just long enough to throw the man to the floor, then he slowed it again. He had heard the car outside peeling away.

As he ran behind the car, he could feel the eyes of pedestrians on him. He kept time at just the right pace for him to catch the car. He knew it must appear as if he was running forty miles per hour, but his captain already knew he was a fast runner, so he wasn't worried about any reports that might be filed.

When he got to the driver's side window, which was open, he slapped cuffs on the surprised man, and then pulled himself inside the car. Shoving the slow-moving man to the other side of the car, he took control of the vehicle, let time restart itself, and then stopped the car.

"You're under arrest. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you can't afford one, you have a right to a public defender. Now sit there, until I get to the other side of the car."

He got out, and walked around to the other side, then opened the passenger door. "Get out and walk back to the liquor store. I'm right behind you." While following the driver, he called in the description and location of the car, so it could be impounded. "All right, mister, stop right there." They were at the door of the store.

The gunman was on his knees, looking around, wondering what had happened. When he saw his accomplice in Clint's custody, he visibly deflated. The proprietor of the store had his own gun out now, pointing it at the gunman. He looked up at Clint.

"Thank you, officer." He pointed at his gun with his eyes. "I was just making sure he didn't get away."

"Thank you, sir. You can put it away now. I'll have a report for you to fill out in a few minutes."

"You did what?" Clint's captain was looking at him incredulously, later that afternoon. "You disarmed the man without drawing your firearm? Then you chased the car on foot, and apprehended the driver, still without drawing your weapon? While leaving the first suspect unattended?"

"Yes sir, I did," Clint answered. "He wasn't going anywhere. He was handcuffed and on the floor. How far could he have gotten?"

"That's not the point, Clint. There's such a thing as police procedure. Maybe we need to put you back with a partner. You think?"

"No sir, I don't think that's necessary. Look. No one was injured, nothing was damaged, nothing was stolen, and both suspects are in custody. Isn't that my job?"

Captain James O'Connell leaned back in his chair. "Listen to me, Allen. I know you're fast. I know you finished at the top of your class in the academy. I know you're strong, and intelligent. That's still not the point. I've been with the force for thirty-two years, and I don't need some hotshot running around and making a hero of himself. That's how people get hurt. Maybe it didn't happen this time and maybe it won't happen next time. But it will happen. And I've got the Chief to report to, not to mention the mayor, the city council, and Internal Affairs. Besides all that, things like this always bring the media's attention to our department, which I don't like. And you put funny ideas into the heads of other officers. Okay?"

"Yes sir. I understand. I promise I'll be careful. Just one more thing, sir."

"Yes?"

"Sir, you've been on the streets. You know that sometimes when it all comes down, you don't have time to think about procedure. I was thinking only of stopping the crime. Maybe I didn't follow the procedure, but I didn't break any laws, or violate the suspects' rights, did I?"

"No, you didn't, Allen. And, yes, I remember what it's like being on the streets. And I was reprimanded a few times, myself. But I didn't get where I am today by doing my own thing."

"Everything all right, honey?" Melissa asked him, as she came through the door. Clint was sitting on the couch, looking thoughtful. "You don't look like your normal, chipper self."

He looked up, and grinned tiredly. "Yeah, everything's good. I pulled in two crooks today, by myself. I thought I would be congratulated, but instead I was reprimanded by the captain."

"What for?"

"Oh, I didn't follow procedure. I took them both without waiting for backup, without drawing my weapon, and I left the first guy there while I chased the second guy." *Damn, I wish I could tell her about Time. How would she react?*

"You did what? I would have reprimanded you too." She leaned over and gave him a kiss. "You're an amazing man, Clint Allen, especially in bed, but you're no superman. Unless there's something you're not telling me."

He looked up sharply. "What?" Then he realized that the last sentence had been a joke. He smiled. "Oh, honey, if I were a superhero in disguise, surely you would've met my alter ego by now." He narrowed his eyes. "You haven't been seeing a superhero on the side, without telling me, have you?"

She laughed. "And would you blame me? Surely you could forgive me for having an affair with Superman, honey."

"As long as you're not having an affair with Clark Kent. That would worry me. Is it my turn to cook?"

"I think it's your turn to take me out to dinner."

Clint lay back, breathing hard. Melissa slid off him, and lay beside him, her arm across his chest, her breasts pressed against his side.

“My God,” she said. “Still amazing, after six years. How do you do it?”

“You’d be surprised what a man can do for the woman he loves. Hand me a cigarette, please?”

She reached behind her to the nightstand, and retrieved a pack, pulling two smokes from it. She replaced the pack, got the lighter, and lit both cigarettes. Then she placed one between his lips.

“No, seriously, Clint. That’s not what I’m talking about. I mean, in general. Like the other night, when my shoe caught on the rug on the way to the table. You managed to catch the pan of spaghetti *and* me, without spilling a thing. You move faster than anyone I’ve ever seen. And that time, a few months ago, when you knocked the ashtray off the table. You caught the ashtray, and then caught most of the butts and ashes in it before they could hit the floor. It isn’t natural.”

I knew I married a smart woman, he thought, but I was hoping I could tell her about this on my own time.

He took a deep drag on his cigarette, and looked at her. “I guess I’m just faster than the ordinary human being. You remember our senior year of high school? I was a walk-on for the track team, and set the state record in track?”

“Of course I remember, dear. I always wondered why you didn’t take that athletic scholarship to State. But I also always wondered why you hadn’t been in track before, if you were that fast.”

“I told you, honey; it was because I wanted to be with you, here in Boston.”

“Here’s another question, Clint.” She sat up, and pulled the ashtray from the nightstand, setting it in between them. “What happened, in January of our senior year? Before that, you were just a fuck-up, except when it came to cars, or drinking beer. All of a sudden, you started making some of the best grades in our class, cleaned yourself up, got promoted, started wearing nice clothes, and went out for track. Most of my friends just figured you were doing all that to get in bed with me. I even thought that a few times. But you kept doing it. Even after we got married at the end of the summer, you kept getting smarter, and better. I kept wondering when you were going to slack off. I mean, you already ‘got the girl’. I keep wondering when you’re going to slide back into your old self.”

He flicked his ash into the tray, and sat up, facing her. “Baby, we’ve been married for almost six years, and you’re just now letting these suspicions out in the open? Why didn’t you ask me before?”

“I guess I was scared of what you’d say. You know, the other day, a reporter came by here, asking me what it felt like to be married to the hottest new cop in Boston. She said you’ve pulled some more of those ‘non-procedure’ stunts, and were starting to make the news. I’ve even seen you on the local news a few times. And one of my friends at school told me she saw you too. I’m starting to wonder if maybe there’s something you’re not telling me.”

“Maybe I’m just trying to be a hero.”

She stopped smiling. “Okay, Clint, you just said that with the same face you were wearing when you told me you’d only slept with one girl before me. I can tell when you’re avoiding the truth. Is everything okay? You know you can tell me, baby. I haven’t kept anything from you, you know.”

He took a deep breath and leaned back against the pillows. *She’s not going to let me off the hook, is she? Does this mean my secret’s about to come out?* He looked at her. *She’s still as beautiful as that first day I asked her to Ron’s party. I owe it to her, don’t I?*

“Let me show you something.” He got up, and pulled on his pants, then crushed out his cigarette.

She looked confused. “What?”

“Put something on, and come outside.” He didn’t look back, but walked out of the bedroom, down the hall, and out the front door. He waited on the porch.

Inside, she quickly pulled on some shorts and a T-shirt, and followed him to the porch. “Okay, honey. What do you want to show me? If it’s going to be bad, let me have some warning, okay?”

He smiled at her with his face, but his eyes showed something different. "It's not bad, baby. It might just be a little difficult to believe, that's all." He stared out across the side street, then down the street, toward the rest of the city.

"What do you hear?" he asked her.

"Hear? Well, there's traffic. I hear an airliner in the distance, and I hear people talking a few doors down. What am I supposed to be hearing?"

"Okay, now what do you hear?" While he was talking, he had stopped Time, and pulled her into his 'time bubble.' Everything had frozen.

"Oh my God!" She looked around frantically. "I can't hear anything except your voice and mine." She was quiet for a minute. "And I can hear both our hearts beating and our breathing." She turned to him slowly. "What's going on, honey? I'm scared." She moved closer to him, and took his hand.

"Time has stopped." He pulled his key ring out of his pocket, and held it over the edge of the balcony. Just as he dropped it, the keys just hung in mid-air, thirty feet above the ground. "Time is only passing for you and me. The rest of the world has stopped moving. See that man on the corner, there?" He pointed. "His foot isn't touching the ground. He was in the middle of taking a step, but now he's frozen."

She hesitated. "I'm not sure I understand." Melissa moved even closer to him, putting her arm around him.

"Now watch." He started time again, but only very slowly. All the sounds around them were muted, drawn out, and very low in pitch. "Time is only passing slowly now. See that man? He just stepped off that sidewalk. See how slowly he's moving? And look at those cars. Ah! My keys!" The key ring was drifting slowly downward. He stuck his arm through the rails of the porch and retrieved them.

"That's my secret, baby. Time control. Now you're the only one besides me that knows about it."

"Okay..." She looked around, still squeezing him. "I still don't get it. You mean you can... um... stop the passage of time? Or just slow it down, if you want to?"

"Yes."

"Can you go back in time? Or speed it up?"

He raised his eyebrows in surprise, and looked at her. "How about that. I never even thought about it. I don't know. Maybe I'll test that out someday."

"And you've been able to do this since... when?"

He put an arm around her. "Remember that day, when I asked if you were going to Ron's party? And you said you'd ride with me if I beat your grade on the history test?"

"Yeeessss..." She pulled away from him a little.

"It was the day before that I found out I could do it. I've been able to do it ever since, and I got better at it. I can slow time down to any rate I choose, or stop it completely. As far as I know, everything around the world just stops."

"Okay..." She pulled away from him completely. "Is that how you beat my score on the history test?"

"Yes," he answered, smiling, "except that I didn't know what you were going to say that next day. I was just trying to make a good grade, and I was running out of time."

"And is that how you beat Ron, in that little race you guys had?"

"No. I didn't cheat, baby. Well, maybe a little. I didn't slow time down for my car. Just for me, so I would have better control in the corners."

"Hmm." She wrinkled up her forehead. "And you've been using this ability to make good grades at MIT, and at the Academy." It was a statement, not a question. "And that's how you've pulled off some of those capers on the job, and some of the other things I was asking you about?"

"Yes, baby." He put his hands on her shoulders. "Listen to me, Melissa. I didn't ask for this ability. I don't know how I got it, or why. I do know that I've kept it hidden from you all this time, because I thought you would love me less, or think of me as some kind of cheater. Not just on tests, but in life in general."

"Ah. I don't know, baby. Look, this is getting weird. Can you start it back up?"

He released his hold. Everything jumped back to normal speed, and the sounds returned. "There. Feel better?"

"I don't know. Let's go back inside."

When they were back inside, she lit another cigarette, and offered him one, which he accepted. Then she sat on the couch. He sat beside her.

Please, God, or whatever deity is out there, don't let her leave me over this. I was just doing what I thought was best, and maybe making a little extra money on the

side. Please.

“Okay,” she said, turning to him and running a hand through her hair. “Tell me more.”

“What do you want to know?”

“Well, I’m thinking of some of the other implications of this ability. You could stop time, go down to the grocery store, and come home with all kinds of food, without anyone seeing you. Right?”

“Yes, I could.”

“Have you?”

“Am I on trial here?”

“Yes.”

He sat back, taking a deep drag. “Listen, baby. Once, I stopped time, and went out of town, to practice with my pistol, back when I was still in the Academy. On the way back, with time still stopped, I passed an armored car. The back door was open, and I could see piles of moneybags. I was tempted to take one or two. I almost did it. But then I thought of those two guys working. If any money came up missing, they’d be fired. Even if they could prove that they hadn’t taken it themselves, they’d have been fired for being careless with the money. So I didn’t do it.

“I’ve never done anything with my ability that would cause harm to someone. So far, I’ve used my ability to arrest quite a few criminals that could be out on the street, causing people harm. I’ve kept us from having to clean up a few messes around the house. And I adjusted a few records regarding my dad’s house in Watkins, so now he doesn’t get any more bills.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“Two years ago, honey. I went back to Watkins, and changed the computer records at the bank. MIT taught me how to do that. Their records show that it was paid in full. Now, he just pays the electric bill, the water bill, and the cable bill. It was the least I could do, after all the shit he’s been through.”

“Isn’t that illegal, Clint? I mean, there could be an investigation, and you or your dad could get in a lot of trouble.”

“I used gloves when I was typing on the computer and changing the records on paper. I used the password of one of the bank vice presidents. Even if they went looking through the records, they would just find that the balance had been paid in full. I took very small amounts of money from hundreds of other very large accounts, put them into a new account, and then paid off the house. The bank didn’t lose any money. Quite a few wealthy corporations lost a few dollars each, that they’ll never miss. They can investigate all they want to, but the trail is gone. The account that I used to pay my dad’s mortgage only existed for a split second of real time, and there are no records of it.”

Melissa shook her head. “I’m sorry, honey, but this all a little crazy. For one thing, I don’t know how I feel about being married to a criminal, even if he is a very smart and talented one. For another thing, I don’t see how the laws of physics permit such a thing to happen. Why does gravity work for you when the rest of the world is in suspended animation? How can one man – you – control the orbits of planets and stars? I just don’t understand it.”

“There’s something else that doesn’t make sense, baby. I can stop Time for two or three weeks at a time, and never get hungry or thirsty. It’s like my body doesn’t use any actual energy while Time is stopped.”

She looked surprised. “That *is* odd. Maybe the energy that isn’t being used by all the planets is transferred to you somehow.” She paused. “What’s the longest time that you’ve stopped Time? Or can you measure it?”

He laughed. “I know; the English language doesn’t have words for something like this. But, yes, I can measure it. I can bring my watch into stopped time with me. I’ve had to reset it quite a few times. I would say the longest I’ve existed in stopped time is a few weeks. My hair doesn’t grow, so I don’t have to shave. I don’t eat, or drink, or even go to the bathroom during that time.”

“So, does this make you a superhero after all?”

“I guess so, baby. I can dodge bullets, and run faster than a speeding car. What I haven’t figured out how to do is fly, or jump a building with a single bound. I can stop a locomotive, though.”

“No way!”

“Yeah, but I haven’t. It would kill anyone on board, I think. You see, if you jumped out in front of a train, you wouldn’t slow it down much. In fact, the engineer might not even notice it. But, mathematically speaking, you would slow it just a fraction.

So, with time slowed considerably, I can push on the train. That push slows it just a tiny fraction of a mile per hour. But I keep pushing. Eventually, the train is stopped. But, to the people inside, it would seem like the train went from sixty to zero in one second. They would all be splattered on the front walls of their compartments. I can also lift it off the track. You see, gravity doesn't really work when there's no time. So, if you're ever trapped under a car, give me a call. I'll have you out in a split second."

They crushed out their cigarettes, almost simultaneously. Melissa looked up at him. "From now on, every time something seems like a coincidence around you, I'm going to think you're manipulating time."

"And some of those times, I will be," he said, looking her in the eye. "Melissa, I love you. I've had a crush on you since I was in the sixth grade, and I've loved you ever since we went on that first date. But if this new revelation makes you feel like you've been tricked in some way, I'll understand."

"Baby." She took his hand. "This isn't something I can decide right now. It's just that it feels like the bottom has dropped out from under me, and I'm not sure what the world is all about anymore. You could be an Olympic gold medallist or a super criminal with this ability. But, instead, you're a Boston cop, married to a medical student."

"You could be any of those things too," he reminded her. "Don't forget that I can stop time for you too. Or anyone else for that matter. If you're running late for something, just let me know; I can fix it. Or if you need some more time to study for a test. And I'm sure you'll think of other things that we can do with this. All I ask is that you not tell anyone. For one thing, no one will believe you. And if they do, the government will be all over us."

She looked out the front window for a second, then turned back to him. "Maybe you should tell the government. They might be able to do something with the technology."

"Baby," he laughed, "I don't think it has anything to do with technology. Besides, they'd probably want to cut my head open."

She laughed, and squeezed his hand. "Well, if you talked to them, and that's what they wanted to do, you could pull a disappearing act."

"Look, Allen, I don't have any other choice." Captain O'Connell looked at him, his eyebrows drawn together. "I've warned you more than once."

"But *suspension*, sir? I've brought in more crooks than any other cop on the force in the last two years. I haven't injured anyone, and no one's been injured at any of my crime scenes, unless it was before I got there. My record's clean."

"I know that, Allen, but when IA comes in for an investigation, that's the best way. If they think you're dirty, the best thing I can do is suspend you while they investigate. That way, I look good – like I'm trying to cooperate with them."

"But how can they think I'm dirty? I have all my financial records at home. Besides, they can pull it all up on a computer, if they want to. I'm just doing my job."

"Listen to me." O'Connell was growing frustrated. "Every time a new cop has this many arrests, with no fuckups, then there's something wrong. Every time. No one can be that lucky. No one."

Clint sagged in his chair. "So," he said dejectedly, "how long is this going to last?"

"As long as it takes. As long as it fucking takes, Allen."

Clint shrugged, and pulled the badge off his uniform, and slid it onto O'Connell's desk. Slowly, and carefully, he took his gun from its holster, unloaded it, and set it beside his badge. "Not like I've used it anyway, except at the firing range."

He looked up at O'Connell. "So, now I just sit at home, and wait for them to call?"

"No. They're waiting for you, right now." O'Connell pointed. "That's them, right over there."

“That can’t be right,” Clint said. “My dad still had several years of payments to go. If he won the lottery, he would’ve told me.”

The cop’s cop across from him rolled his eyes. “Mr. Allen, *please*. We go through this all the time. You’re trying to tell me you didn’t know that your father’s house has been paid off?”

“That’s right, Mr. Holt. I’m sure he would have told me, no matter how it was paid off. I’m not sure what this is all about.”

“Lieutenant Allen, please cooperate. It’s my job to investigate activities or practices in the police force that seem questionable or suspicious. It’s the function of my office to protect the American people against a police force that might not be doing its job properly. Just answer the questions, okay?”

“Sure. I just don’t see where all this is going.”

“Lt. Allen, have you ever been offered a bribe, a cash payment by a suspect, for any reason?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Holt raised his eyebrows. “Really? Tell me about it.”

Clint leaned forward in his seat, placing his elbows on the table between them. After lighting a cigarette, he went on, “Several of the people I’ve arrested have offered me one thing or another. They’ve offered me money, sex, information – all kinds of things, asking me to let them go free.”

“Okay, now we’re getting somewhere. Have you cited any of these suspects for ‘attempting to bribe a police officer’?”

“No. I was told at the Academy that if I already had a better charge against them, not to worry about it.”

“Have you ever taken a suspect up on one of these offers?”

“No. Although that one chick I busted for shoplifting didn’t look too bad. But I have a beautiful wife that fully satisfies me, Mr. Holt. There’s not one reason in the world I would’ve fucked that girl, especially if it meant she was getting off the hook.”

Mr. Holt grinned. “Must be nice to have a wife like that. I had one once. What about money? Have you ever taken money from any suspect, or criminal, for any reason?”

“Yes.”

Again, the surprised look on Mr. Holt’s face. “Tell me about it.”

“This is crazy, Mr. Holt. I have to take their personal possessions when they’re arrested. It’s all turned in to the property office. I assumed that the property is returned when the suspects are released.”

“You know that’s not what I’m talking about. Have you ever taken it for your own personal gain?”

“No.”

“Would you be willing to take a polygraph to verify that statement, Lt. Allen?”

“Yes. And about my checking account and my dad’s house. Look, Mr. Holt, I’m just doing my job. I know I don’t always follow procedure to the letter. And I know that my arrest record looks way too good. Maybe that just means I’m good. Check out some of the videotapes that were running during some of my arrests. They’ll show that I move faster than the average person does. I had excellent grades at the Academy, and...”

“I know. You were first in your class. And your file indicates that you have a computer engineering degree from MIT. Looks like you were sixth in your class there. I suppose it’s possible that you are just a really good cop. However, Lt. Allen, most of the time that I run across a record like yours, it’s because the cop’s getting a payoff from a criminal organization. Sometimes the payoffs are larger than others. And sometimes, the payoff is not in the form of cash. I’m sure you are aware that organized crime syndicates will pay off a cop with information about another organization. And sometimes they will even tip off a cop about one of their own operations, if he promises not to bother the organization as a whole. That’s what we’re looking at here, Lieutenant.”

“I understand, sir,” Clint said, “but I would just like to get the whole thing over with. When’s the polygraph?”

“Well, I haven’t determined that we’ll have to do that yet. But we’ll let you know.”

"I just want to know when I can go back to work."

"You're getting paid, aren't you?"

"Well, yes, Mr. Holt. But I'm not going to have anything to do. I can't just sit around the house until you decide I'm on the good guys' side."

"Watch TV, Lieutenant Allen. I hear there are some good shows on in the evenings. Not that I've ever had time for one. Oh! Almost forgot. Do you mind if we have someone talk to your father?"

"Suspension? That's horrible, honey." Melissa was sitting across the dinner table from him.

Clint picked a hot roll out of the basket, and started applying margarine to it.

"I'm still getting paid, baby. They found out about my dad's house."

"Oh my God, sweetie. That's horrible." She started to get up.

"Sit down, baby. They don't know about my involvement, and they never will. They just found that it's been paid for. I told him the truth, that my dad's never mentioned it to me. He said I'd have to take a polygraph about some things. I think I can get past that. I can honestly say that I didn't pay off my dad's mortgage. And I can honestly say that I haven't been paid off by any criminals."

He took a bite of the roll, and looked up at her. "I'm not worried. I'm just frustrated that I'll be bored."

"What's going on here?" Harrison looked at his partner.

"Don't ask me, Frank. I just got here too," Baker said.

They stared at the man in front of them. He was disheveled, and looking confused. "Well, come on, detective," he pleaded with Harrison. "Get me off this pole!"

Harrison looked at Baker and laughed. Then he turned to the unidentified man. "How in hell did you get yourself handcuffed to that parking meter? Hey, wait a minute. What's this?"

He picked up the manila envelope that was lying on the ground just out of the handcuffed man's reach. Opening the envelope, he pulled out two Polaroid pictures.

"Well, lookie here, Jimmy. We got a hold-up artist trying to turn himself in." He handed the photographs to his partner.

Baker took the photographs. Then he looked at the papers Harrison was pulling from the manila envelope. "Okay, so he tried to rob a convenience store. How'd he end up here?" Baker turned to the man. "What's your name, son?"

"I want to talk to a lawyer. And get these cuffs off me. That guy that brought me here wasn't a cop."

"Oh," Harrison said. "So you didn't bring yourself here?"

"No. Some guy just grabbed me, cuffed me, put a sack over my head, and brought me here."

"And," Baker said, "you didn't happen to be in the process of robbing a convenience store at the time? These pictures look self-explanatory to me. And the note on this piece of paper says we can find the gun at the same convenience store, along with a signed statement from the cashier and some videotape. Is that true?"

The man looked around, wildly. "Okay! I did it! I robbed the fucking store. Okay! Just get me out of these cuffs. I've been standing here for two hours."

Harrison held up his hands. "Hold up here. "You say a man brought you here?"

"Yeah."

"Who was he?"

"I don't fucking know."

"What did he look like?"

"I don't *fucking* know! He had a mask on. He was about six feet tall, same as me, and in really good shape. He moved like lightning. Took me down in a second. I thought he was going to kill me. He put that sack over my head and put me in his car. Then he took me out, and cuffed me to this pole. And he left."

Harrison and Baker exchanged glances. Harrison shrugged. "Take him inside and book him. It'll be an open-and-shut case. We've got a confession, and all the evidence we need."

Jeannie touched a button, and spoke into her headset, "Nine-one-one. What's the nature of your emergency?"

The female voice on the other end was calm. “Ma’am? There’s no emergency anymore. Um, I called you about five minutes ago, because a man broke into my apartment. I don’t need the police anymore. I mean, I do, but not right away. Some other guy came in right after I called, and took care of it.”

“Do what?” Jeannie was a little confused. “Say that again, ma’am?”

“Yeah. This guy with a mask came in through my window, right behind the first guy. He tackled the first guy, and tied him up. He told me to call you guys, to let you know I was okay.”

Jeannie looked around for her supervisor, and waved him over. “Ma’am? You say that a second man entered your apartment, and apprehended the man who broke in?” Her supervisor plugged his headset into her computer, and listened in.

“That’s right.”

“So, where is the man who broke into your apartment?”

“He’s sitting on the front porch, where the other guy left him. He’s tied to the railing. I’ve got his gun here.”

“He was armed?”

“Yes. The other guy unloaded his gun, and set it on my kitchen table. He said if I touched it, I would mess up the fingerprints. He took the gun out of the other guy’s hands.”

“Where is this second man now?”

“Oh. He left, right afterward. He just stopped this thug, tied him up and put the gun on the table. Then he told me not to touch the gun, and that I should call you. Then he just left.”

Jeannie’s supervisor cut in, “Ma’am, I’m the 9-1-1 supervisor. Do you know either one of these men?”

“No. Well, I know I don’t know the guy who broke in. The other one was wearing a mask.”

Jeannie looked at her supervisor, and shook her head. He spoke again. “Okay, ma’am, just sit tight. We’ve already dispatched a patrol car to your location. They’re right around the corner. They’ll be up in a minute or two.” He shrugged back at Jeannie, then shook his head before speaking again. “You sure you’re alright, ma’am?”

“Oh, yes. I’m fine, now. Just a little confused, that’s all.”

The large, concrete bank building was surrounded by patrol cars, ambulances, news crews, etc. Confusion was the order of the day. Three dozen police officers were in position around the building, guns drawn, awaiting orders. All of them were looking intently at the front door. Behind them, by their van, a dozen S.W.A.T. team members were gathered around their team leader.

Inside, the two of the bank robbers were in intense conversation, while the other three covered the employees with their weapons. One of the others yelled to the first two. “Come on, Frankie! What are we gonna do? They’re all over out there!”

Frankie looked up. “I said no names, you fucking idiot! We’re working on it!”

He turned back to his buddy, and spoke in quiet tones. “Listen. We’re gonna have to use the hostages. We’re gonna have to talk to them, and get a helicopter on the roof. If we don’t, they’re gonna send that S.W.A.T. team in here, and shoot us all.”

“I know, Frankie, but we’re not gonna make it. I’m fucking panicking, here. Even if they give us a helicopter, there’ll be a tracking device on it, and they’ll find us. We’re never gonna spend this fucking money, Frankie. Hell, they’ve already got the fucking car.”

Before Frankie could reply, he felt himself being grabbed from behind. Before he could react, there were cuffs on his hands, and his automatic rifle had been ripped away from him. His partner had no time to bring his automatic rifle to bear before he too felt his hands being restrained.

The other three bank robbers began to swing their rifles around. One actually pulled his trigger. The next thing he knew, the rifle was ripped out of his hands, and he was thrown to the floor – hard. The other two followed soon after.

The employees and customers that had been lying facedown on the floor began to look around. A man wearing all black, including a facemask, was rounding up the five bank robbers, holding one of their own rifles pointed at them. The security guard stood to his feet. “Who the hell are you?”

The man with the black facemask turned to him. “I’m the guy that just saved your day.” He turned back to the bank robbers. “Now MOVE! Get your hands on your heads, and march to that door.”

Frankie called back. “Man, they’ll shoot us! What the hell are you doing?”

“Why are you worried about being shot? If you didn’t have shooting in mind, why’d you bring all the firepower? Keep MOVING!”

Just before the first bank robber reached the outer door, the man in black called out, “Wait right there. Don’t move. I’m going to ensure your safety.” He pulled a radio from his belt, and spoke into it. “Attention, Boston Police Department! We are coming out. We are unarmed and ready to surrender. We ask that you take into account that no one was harmed during our crime. Repeat: We are coming out. We are unarmed and ready to surrender. Please take into account that no one was harmed during our crime.”

Suddenly, there was a reply. “This is chief of police Martin Bradley. I heard shots in there. What’s going on?”

“It was an accident. No one was hurt.”

“I don’t know what’s going on in there, but if you come through that front door, make sure your hands are on your heads, and that there are no weapons in sight. Do exactly what my officers tell you to do. Over.”

“We read you,” the man in black said, “and we will follow orders.” He shut off the radio. “You guys hear that? Just do what they tell you. Now, get out the door.”

The police officers gathered around the building watched in surprise as the five bank robbers exited, one by one, with their hands on their heads. All five of them looked very confused. They blinked at the sunlight, and at the officers running toward them and shouting.

Inside, the man in black turned back to the hostages, who were all getting to their feet and brushing themselves off. “Listen up,” he said. “You’re safe now. The bad men with the guns are now in the custody of Boston’s finest. Be well.” With that said, he sat the rifle he had been holding on the ground next to the other four rifles, and promptly disappeared into thin air.

The security guard walked slowly over to the spot where the man had been kneeling by the guns. He picked up a small card that was lying on the floor. It read “Time Boy strikes again.” He heard the doors opening, and looked up to see several police officers coming into the bank.

“This Cindy Rockford for Eyewitness News, reporting live from the Bank of Boston, where today, an attempt to rob this bank was foiled by a mysterious man wearing all black. Eyewitnesses say that a man wearing black pants, a long-sleeved black shirt, a black facemask, and black gloves entered the bank from an unknown entrance, disarmed and bound the five suspects, then escorted them out the front door, where they were taken into custody by Boston police.

“They also say that the man then mysteriously vanished into thin air, leaving a card with the words ‘Time Boy strikes again’ printed on it. Boston police chief Martin Bradley says that the department is currently investigating several other incidents involving the enigmatic Time Boy. He says that as far as he knows, Time Boy has been involved in capturing more than thirty criminals in Boston in the last week alone.

“I have here with me Maria Hopkitch, who works at the Bank of Boston. She was on the job when the bank robbers entered. Mrs. Hopkitch, can you tell me what happened?”

Maria Hopkitch looked excitedly at the camera, then back at Cindy Rockford. “Well, at first, it was just like you see in the movies. The five men came in, shouting and waving their guns around. They told us to get on the floor, then they got Mr. Vargas to open the safe, and started dumping money into bags. Then the cops showed up, with their megaphones and all that. We thought there was about to be a gunfight, but then this guy just appeared out of nowhere. I don’t know how he got in because my face was pressed against the floor. But all of a sudden, he was fighting five men. Before we could react, he had them all down.”

“Maria, the police tell me that several shots were fired from an automatic weapon. Who fired those shots? Was it ‘Time Boy’?”

“Oh, no. He didn’t even have a gun. That was one of the bank robbers, trying to hit him. It looked like this guy just dodged the bullets, then took the gun away. He had all five of them tied up in a matter of seconds. Then he told them to go outside. Oh yeah. First, he called the police from a radio, and asked them not to hurt anyone. After he got the other men out, he just disappeared.”

“Thank you, Maria. That was Maria Hopkitch, in her own words, describing what took place at the Bank of Boston. I’ll have more on the story, tonight at ten. I’m Cindy Rockford, for Eyewitness News.”

The national TV and internet news networks soon attached themselves to the “Time Boy” story. Correspondents began flooding into Boston for interviews with Police Chief Bradley, who wasn’t saying anything more than he had said before. It wasn’t long before a reporter showed up at the Allen apartment.

Clint answered the door. “Hello?”

“Yes. I’m Alicia Smith, from Channel 6 News. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions, Mr. Allen?”

“Uh, I guess so. Come on in.” He stood back while she came in, her camera operator behind her. He motioned them to the sofa in the front room. “Have a seat. Is this about my suspension?”

Smith sat down, while her camera man remained standing. “Something like that, Mr. Allen.”

Before sitting down, he offered them something to drink, which she declined. The young man with the camera accepted his offer, and Clint brought him a soda. Then he sat down. “Go ahead, Ms. Smith.”

“Mr. Allen, it is public knowledge that you were suspended from the Boston police force less than two weeks ago, pending an investigation by Internal Affairs.”

“That’s right.”

“May I ask you what this investigation was about?”

He grinned. “Apparently, they thought my record was too clean. I’m not sure how much I’m allowed to tell you, Ms. Smith, but I think they were wondering how I could make so many arrests in only two years, seeing that I’m relatively inexperienced. They couldn’t accept that I’m just a good cop, trying to do my duty.”

“I see, Mr. Allen.” She shifted a little in her seat. “Are you familiar with the exploits of the so-called ‘Time Boy’?”

He laughed. “A little. I’ve seen a report or two on the news. I think one of them was yours. Seems like he’s made quite a name for himself.”

She looked him in the eye. “Mr. Allen, I find it highly coincidental that nothing like this has ever happened in Boston before now, and then, only a day or two after your suspension began, Time Boy appears on the scene.”

“Yes,” he acceded, “the timing is a little odd.”

“I also find it interesting that his methods are very similar to your own. You never once drew your sidearm during an arrest, and Time Boy doesn’t carry one. You were known for your quick and daring approaches to suspects, as is Time Boy. While you were actively on the force, no one was injured, and Time Boy has made sure that no one is hurt while he is operating. Don’t you find any of this a little too coincidental, Mr. Allen?”

Clint smiled and shook his head, while pulling out a cigarette. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

“It’s your home, Mr. Allen.”

“Thank you.” He lit the cigarette carefully, and took a deep drag. Then he looked Alicia Smith in the eye. “Ms. Smith, I was – and still am – a good cop. Right now, I am on paid suspension from the Boston Police Department, pending investigation by Internal Affairs. I’m not happy about that, but I have nothing against them; they’re just doing their jobs. If you’re trying to imply that during my time off I’ve gone around the city saving lives and stopping crimes, then you must think very highly of me. I’m a good cop, not a hero.”

She didn’t say anything. Instead, she waited, to see if he was going to say something more.

He did, after another drag on his cigarette. “Besides, I’ve heard that this guy appears out of thin air, then disappears again. Like that thing at the Bank, a few days ago. Not one cop saw him enter or leave that building, yet they had the place surrounded. If that had been me, all of them would have seen me walk through their midst, and I probably would have been arrested for interfering. How do you think your ‘Time Boy’ got into that bank, Ms. Smith?”

She smiled. “I’ve talked to several of the eyewitnesses. None of them saw him arrive, so that’s still in question. However, every single one of them is willing to testify in court that when he left, he just plain disappeared. The police have gone over every inch

of that room, looking for another entrance or exit. Someone thinks he may have gone through the floor, into the sewer ducts. But I doubt it. By the way, is that ‘Hugo’ you’re wearing?”

“What? Oh, my cologne. Yes, it is. A present from my wife.”

“What other colognes are you prone to wear, Mr. Allen?”

He looked confused. “What do you mean?”

She smiled. “A couple of my female eyewitnesses said that Time Boy was wearing Drakkar Noir. That wouldn’t happen to be an alternate cologne choice of yours, would it?”

“Oh.” He laughed, easily. “No, I can’t say that I’ve ever worn Drakkar, except maybe from a sample in a department store. I wouldn’t even have this Hugo, except that Melissa bought it for me. Is there anything else?”

“Not at this time, Mr. Allen. Sorry to have bothered you.”

“No problem, Ms. Smith. I’m sorry I was a waste of your time.”

A minute later, as Alicia Smith and the man with the camera were getting into their van, she flipped on the police scanner. “I guess we’ll just have to wait for Time Boy to strike again.”

Just then, a report caught her ear. Time Boy had just dropped off two perpetrators at the police station and disappeared. She looked up. Clint was waving to them from his balcony. Well, that took care of that.

Melissa and Clint sat together on the couch, watching the news that night. Alicia Smith had just given her report on Time Boy, and Clint Allen’s denial of any involvement. Melissa turned to Clint.

“Be careful, baby. Some of these reporters are bloodhounds; I don’t think you’ll keep them off your trail for long. And it’s not going to do me any good to have them hounding me at medical school.”

Clint picked up the remote control and turned the TV off. “Listen, honey. There is no trail. When she came by this afternoon, she was hot on my trail. But she didn’t mention in her report that Time Boy struck again when she could still see me. When she heard the report on her police scanner, I was waving at her from the balcony. The event happened on the other side of town. Before they suspect me again, they’re going to have to admit that the laws of physics don’t apply anymore, and I don’t think the courts are ready to do that.”

She shook her head. “So, this is what it’s like to be married to a superhero.” Turning to him, she said, “You know what the police are worried about, don’t you? They’re worried that other people are going to try to imitate you. And someone probably will, now that the pictures are on national news. And when someone does try to imitate Time Boy’s antics, someone will get hurt.”

“Yeah, you’re right, baby. In fact, I think someone’s already tried it, in New York. They were shot in the leg. The thing is, no one can really do what I do. The second I hear about an emergency on the scanner, I can be at the crime scene that instant. I can appear out of nowhere, and disappear. It’s almost like teleportation. In fact, it’s exactly like teleportation, to anyone else. I immediately transfer the mass of my body from one location to another, without any time passage. I could appear in Tokyo this instant, for that matter.

“Time Boy has never once left any finger prints, and there is nothing in this apartment or in any of our cars that can lead them to us.”

She pulled back just a little. “What about those little cards he’s leaving everywhere? He – I mean you have to print those up somewhere. You didn’t use our computer?”

“No.”

“Then how? A print shop?”

“No, I have another computer.”

“So where is it?”

“Okay, honey, how much do you really want to know about your superhero? Haven’t you heard about ‘plausible deniability’? That means ‘the less you know, the less you can spill.’ That’s how the CIA treats the President, right? They don’t tell him about some of their operations, so if it ever goes bad, he can legitimately deny that he ever knew anything about it.”

“Okay, Clint, or ‘Time Boy,’ let me guess. With money that you took from one person or another, supposedly unnoticed, you purchased another apartment. Probably under a false identity that you set up, using the police or DMV computer. Then you

bought this fictitious character a car, with legal tags. You set up a computer in this apartment, that you can use for Time Boy's activities. Also, if I were to find this apartment, I would find a few pair of black pants, black shoes and black gloves. In the closet, I would probably find a few black shirts. And there's a black mask in there somewhere. What else?"

Clint was staring at her with a bemused expression on his face. "What have we here? A burgeoning police detective? Your hypothesis sounds good, honey. Maybe someday you too can be a superhero."

"Don't patronize me, honey." She leaned in closer, pressing her body against his, and kissed him softly on the cheek. Then, with her lips still touching his face, she said softly, "Just tell me how close I am."

"You're pretty close, baby. In more ways than one." He turned his head, and his lips met hers. "I just hope the CIA doesn't use you as my interrogator. I wouldn't be able to keep anything quiet, not with this kind of questioning."

The next day, Mr. Holt from Internal Affairs showed up at his door. Clint let him in without any fuss, and offered him a soda.

"No thanks. Got any coffee?"

"Not made. I can start some."

"Don't worry about it," Holt said. "I don't plan on being here that long." After Clint sat down, he went on, "I saw that nice little interview that Alicia Smith did with you. At least, I saw the part that was on TV. Seems like someone beat me to the obvious conclusion."

Clint managed to look genuinely surprised. "The 'obvious conclusion'? What's so obvious about it?"

"You know what I'm saying, Lieutenant. I don't want to ask you the same questions that she asked. But she had a good point. She's not the only one that finds it interesting that Time Boy's 'strikes' started right after you were suspended, and that his *modus operandi* is surprisingly similar to your own. I want to know what you've been doing with your time since our last meeting."

Clint lit a cigarette. "Sitting around, watching TV. You were right; there are some good shows on in the evenings. During the day, though, it's hard to find something to watch."

Holt leaned back on the couch, and lit his own cigarette. "What else?"

Clint shrugged. "Oh, I've gone to the gym a few times, to work out, and I've been to the track, running. I can still do the mile in under four minutes."

Holt smiled, wryly. "Should have been in the Olympics. What else, Lieutenant?"

Clint held up his hands. "I'm sorry. Should I be keeping a diary? Look, I've played on the computer a little, went to a few movies, took my wife out to eat, went shopping, and had great sex, several times. I'm sorry if some people – you included – are starting to think that I might be this 'Time Boy' character. I admit that his mode of operation is similar to mine. Maybe it's somebody that saw one of those reports a few months ago, or last year, about my police work, and got inspired. I don't know. And I have no idea what this 'appearing and disappearing out of thin air' nonsense is about. Okay?"

"Okay, Lieutenant Allen. I'm sorry. I also apologize that this investigation has taken so long. I've got a few other ones running right now that are turning up a little more. I'll admit that I've turned up nothing on you except a perfect record, good scores in college and the Academy, and your father's mysterious disappearing mortgage. I talked to him by the way."

"Oh really? What did my dad have to say? I haven't spoken to him in a few months."

Holt flicked his ash into the tray on the coffee table. "He mentioned that he doesn't talk to you as much as he would like to. He says he doesn't have anything left in this world except you. And he's proud of you. As far as the house goes, he said he called the bank when he didn't get a bill one month. They told him that he didn't owe anything further, so he hung up. He told me he's pretty sure it's a bank mistake, and so he's put some money back, just in case they start sending him bills again."

He took another drag. "I also talked to the bank."

"And they said what?"

"They looked up the records for me. The computer showed that one lump sum payment was made, completely covering your father's mortgage. The money came from a

ghost account that no longer exists, and for which no records exist. They also told me that no money was missing from their bank, that a complete inventory is done by computer every hour and by hand at the end of every week. The vice president to which I spoke was very cooperative, and said that it is not unusual to find accounts with no paper records, now that so many people are banking via the internet.

"I also took the liberty of checking all of your financial records. Your department paycheck is direct-deposited in your checking account every two weeks, and you write checks to pay your bills. Your standard of living is directly proportionate to your rate of pay, considering the fact that your wife's parents are paying for her tuition that isn't covered by scholarships."

Clint smiled. "So, basically, you found what I've been telling you all along. I'm just a cop who is trying to do his job, and won't draw his weapon unless it's absolutely necessary. Married to a rich girl, but nonetheless working hard. You know, don't you, Mr. Holt, that if my wife and I ever ran short on cash, we can just call her parents? They've offered several times, and she's turned them down, refusing to take anything we don't need."

"I'm starting to believe you, Lieutenant Allen. But this 'Time Boy' thing has everyone on edge. I've even heard that the FBI has someone in town from Washington, for the sole purpose of going over all the 'Time Boy' reports. I trust that if you know anything about him, you'll let the proper authorities know."

"Sure. Do I still need to take that polygraph?"

"State your name for the record, please."

"William Clint Allen."

"Thank you. Now, I need you to answer a few test questions, to calibrate the equipment. Please answer 'yes' to the following questions. Do you work for the Boston Police Department?"

"Yes." The machine's computer readout remained steady.

"Did you receive a degree in computer engineering from MIT?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever been to Tibet?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Lieutenant Allen, please answer 'yes.' Have you ever been to Tibet?"

"Yes." Sharp squiggles appeared on the screen.

"All right, Mr. Holt. The machine seems to be in order. You may proceed."

Mr. Holt shifted in his seat, and looked at the list of questions in front of him.

"Lieutenant Allen, is it true that you have worked for the Boston PD for two years?"

"Yes. Approximately."

"Thank you. Just answer 'yes' or 'no', if you will. Any numbers will be approximate, unless I say otherwise. Have you ever been offered a bribe of any kind, whether on duty or not?"

"Yes."

"Have you been offered cash bribes?"

"Yes."

"Have you taken any of these bribes?"

"No."

"Have you taken any money, goods or services in return for ignoring criminal activity?"

"No."

"Have you ever cheated on a test, Lieutenant Allen?"

"What kind of test?"

"Any test."

"Yes."

"Did you ever cheat on any of your examinations at the Police Academy?"

Clint had already considered his answer to such a question. He had completed the tests during the *actual* time allotted. He had never looked at any cheat sheets while the *actual time* of the tests was passing. "No."

"Okay." Holt looked at him. "Do you know anything about 'Time Boy', besides what you've heard from news agencies or police reports?"

Clint stopped time. He unhooked himself from the polygraph machine, and went outside. He smoked cigarette, slowly, letting his body calm itself. Audibly, he asked himself a series of questions to which the answer was 'no'. *Have you ever jumped off the Empire State Building? No. Can you recite the Holy Bible? No. Do you know who*

the King of England was in 1342? No. Have you ever worked for IBM? No. Did you write the operating computer program for the White House? No. On and on, until he was sure he could say 'no' when he restarted time.

Then he returned to the office, reattached the polygraph machine to himself, and resumed his former position. Before restarting time, he asked himself one more question. *Are you an Albanian citizen?* Then he let time move on.

"No."

There were other questions, all of which he answered to the satisfaction of the polygraph machine. After twenty minutes, Mr. Holt put his papers down. "That will be all, Lieutenant Allen. You may go. I'll call you tomorrow."

Clint had no sooner walked in his door, than the telephone began ringing. He picked the handset up, and answered. "Hello?"

"Allen, this is O'Connell. I've just spoken with Mr. Holt. You can come back to work. Say, at the beginning of next week?"

"Sound good to me, sir. It's getting a little boring around the house."

"Okay, then. I'll see you Monday. Mr. Holt says that if you're dirty, he'll eat his hat. There are some things he couldn't explain, but you passed the polygraph with flying colors, and his two weeks of investigation didn't turn up anything. I'm sorry about the inconvenience."

"Forgiven. See you Monday."

As soon as he hung up, Clint dialed his father's number.

"Hello?"

"Dad, this is Clint. How are you?"

"Fair to middling, I guess. Whatever the hell that means. Hey, son, did you know there was a guy from Internal Affairs down here, asking about you?"

"Yes, dad. I just talked to him. What all did he say to you?"

"I guess he thought you were dirty, son. He asked me a lot of questions about my house. I know I haven't told you – maybe he did – but someone paid off my mortgage. I finally own this dump. He also said you were one good cop. Made me proud, that did. Maybe I can't hold down a job, or keep a woman, but it seems I raised a damn fine boy."

"I guess so, dad. What have you been up to? I mean, besides drinking beer, and watching the tube?"

There was silence for a moment. Finally, Clint's father spoke, "Son, did I ever tell you I used to write poetry? Back before you were born?"

"No." Clint's confusion was evident in his voice. "What kind?"

"The fucked up kind, son. It seems I was always confused about who I was, and how I was supposed to fit into the world. A lot of them were about the women who fucked me over, and the ones I fucked over."

"So why are you telling me now?"

"Because I started writing again. Ever since you've been gone, I've been writing. I've even written a few stories."

Clint laughed to himself. *My dad, a writer? It can't be.* "What kind of stories?"

"I pulled out some of the old stories that I started when I was your age. They were all in the attic, you know, in boxes. In the last six years, I've finished almost all of them, and started some more. Mostly science fiction, mixed in with some love stories."

"Maybe you could send some up to me. I'd love to read them, dad."

"I'd like for you to read them, too, son. Maybe you could give me some constructive criticism, or something. I've forgotten a lot about writing in the last twenty-four years, although I was pretty good at it, once upon a time."

"Sure, dad. Mail them on up to me, and I'll look them over, when I get time."

"Okay. I hear there's some kind of a hero up there in Boston, solving all kinds of crimes. What's that all about? It's all over the news, down here."

"Oh, you mean 'Time Boy'? Yeah, apparently some joker's running around town wearing all black, and not carrying a weapon of any kind. He's getting pretty popular, even though he's only been around a couple of weeks. I'm just waiting to see how long he can do it without getting himself shot."

"Huh. How about that. Well, son, thanks for the call. I don't want to run up your bill."

"Sure, dad. Take care of yourself."

"All right, then."

8 Development

One Year Later:

Alicia Smith checked her appearance in the monitor briefly, before looking back at the camera. “All right, let’s do this.”

“And, five, four, three, two...” The ‘one’ was a hand gesture, and then the camera was on.

“Over the course of the last year, our city, and others nearby have been the beneficiary of a man whose identity continues to remain secret. Popularly known as ‘Time Boy’, this mysterious man has, single-handedly, lowered the total crime rate here in Boston. Tonight, I’ll fill you in on some more of his exploits.

“Hello, I’m Alicia Smith, Channel Six News.

“When Time Boy first appeared on the scene, slightly more than a year ago, he received much media attention, but since then, the initial excitement has died down. However, he continues to operate in our city, bringing criminals to justice, many times arriving at crime scenes before the police. Many people in our city have come to accept the fact that Time Boy lives and works among us, although no one knows his real identity, or his source of income.”

Alicia stepped to one side as the camera widened its angle. “Here on the city map behind me, you can see the locations of Time Boy’s activities, marked in red. At first it was thought by the Boston PD that they could narrow down the possible sites of Time Boy’s headquarters by seeing where he showed up. As you can see, though, he has operated all over the city, apparently at random.

“I spoke recently to Donald Guff of the FBI’s Time Boy Task Force, who said it is possible that there is more than one ‘Time Boy.’ More than once, Time Boy has arrived at one crime scene, taken care of business, and then minutes later arrived at a scene on the other side of the city. Without the use of some kind of very high-speed transportation, this would not be possible.

“Others contend that Time Boy is in fact only one man, with the ability to travel through time, or perhaps slow it down. This of course, would defy the laws of physics that we have come to accept as incontrovertible.

“A year ago, there was some speculation that Time Boy’s real-life identity was that of Lieutenant Clint Allen, Boston’s young supercop. However, since that time, Time Boy has operated more than once while Lieutenant Allen was in full view of several witnesses. Allen continues to bring in plenty of his own criminals, making his record the best Boston has ever seen for the first three years of one cop’s career, but his numbers pale in comparison to Time Boy’s.

“Recently, I spoke with Lieutenant Allen, who had this to say.”

Her picture was replaced with videotape of Clint Allen, in his living room. “I like him, whoever he is. I know he’s been the inspiration for several imitators, both here in Boston and in other cities, and some of them have been apprehended by police, or injured in action. That’s tapered off in the last few months, thankfully. But I’m glad Time Boy is still here in Boston. It makes my job easier. It makes you safer, Ms. Smith, when you’re at home. And the fact that he’s branched off into other cities will surely have an effect there as well. If no one knows when or where he’s going to appear, people might be more hesitant to commit crimes.”

The camera view on the videotape switched to Alicia Smith. “Lieutenant Allen, what do you think of the theory that Time Boy is using some kind of time dilation to do his work? It has been proposed by some that he can move through time, hence his name.”

Clint laughed. “If the laws of physics can be so easily skewed, then we’ll have to ask ourselves some harder questions about the universe. I think it’s more likely that he’s using some kind of sleight-of-hand or amateur magic to pull off his stunts. Time after time, witnesses have said that he just appeared or disappeared, but there has to be some rational explanation. I’m sure there is also some explanation for the fact that he seems to traverse the entire city in a matter of minutes, even during rush hour.”

“So you think this is just a regular man, operating out of good will for the people, with a few special talents, and not the superhero that the public has made him out to be?”

He laughed again. “Of course, Alicia. Comic-book superheroes are fine for kids or teenagers, but the fact is: they simply don’t exist in real life.”

The video feed cut off there, and the live shot of Alicia Smith returned. “I also spoke with supercop Allen’s wife, Melissa Allen. Melissa is a third-year medical student at Harvard University’s medical school, and Allen’s high school sweetheart. She said she is – and I quote – ‘proud to be married to a man that the city calls “supercop.” He is a wonderful husband to me, a good son to his father and a good man in general.’ Mrs. Allen also said that Time Boy is a blessing to our city.

“At the present time, the FBI task force is still in the city, looking for Time Boy. Several times, a member of the task force has been within mere feet of this mysterious hero, and witnessed his tremendous speed, agility, and ability to disappear without a trace. FBI figures, as well as Boston police statistics, show that Boston’s violent crime has decreased by a startling 36 percent over the last year – the first year in two decades that saw a decrease in crime here in the city.

“And, it is not only violent crimes that have decreased. Other crimes have slowed as well, apparently due to fear that Time Boy will show up, and apprehend the perpetrator. One Boston citizen to whom I spoke said he doesn’t even break the speed limit anymore, just in case Time Boy is watching.

“And now, as a part of this special anniversary report, here is Boston Mayor John Norman.”

Norman stood at a podium, with dozens of members of the press sitting in front of him. He was flanked on one side by Police Chief Martin Bradley and on the other side by the leader of the FBI task force.

After clearing his throat, he began his short speech. “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the press, and citizens of this great city. I have a statement for you, and a statement for the self-titled Time Boy. First, I would like to say to the press and all citizens: Time Boy is not a member of the Boston Police Department. It has been suggested that he is a member of a top-secret special-ops team operating in the city. This is not true. There are no secret organizations within our police force. I do not know the identity of this man, nor does any member of the city council.

“Second, I would like to say something to Time Boy, if he’s listening.” Norman looked directly into the camera. “We appreciate your work in the city. We thank you for bringing in the suspects and criminals that you have brought in. The only way to explain our city’s drastic drop in violent crime is to attribute it to you. However, I would like to speak to you, face to face. The United States of America has no room for vigilantes, operating on their own, to fight crime. We have police forces and federal agencies all around the country that are funded by public monies for the purpose of enforcing our laws. This is the system of government that we have, whether or not it is to your liking.”

He was about to go on, but suddenly, a piece of paper appeared in his left hand, which had been gripping the edge of the podium. Mayor Norman jerked back suddenly, and stared at the piece of paper as if he was afraid it would bite him. A startled gasp went up through the ranks of reporters.

Norman raised his hand. “Quiet down, please. Apparently, I have here a statement from Time Boy, himself.” He began to read. “It says, ‘To Mayor Norman, Police Chief Bradley, members of the press, and Boston citizens: If you wish, you can waste valuable time and precious city resources trying to find me, or bring me into custody. This is not a rational course of action. Instead, I advise that you use extra police resources to better our city, as I have been doing. The money that you have saved on overtime for your police officers: begin a charity fund to clean up neighborhoods that need it. The funds that you save from not paying for officers’ medical bills: put in into a scholarship trust fund for disadvantaged children.’

“It goes on: ‘I have handed you a golden opportunity, Boston. Please do not waste it by wondering about me and my identity. I would say the same thing to the FBI task force: Please cease this waste of taxpayer dollars, and solve a kidnapping. I have not broken any laws. I have not discharged a firearm, or even carried one. I have not injured any bystanders, or even suspects. Without exception, every suspect who I turned in came with enough proof to convict him of said crime(s). This saves on court costs. I am here to help the city. You should do the same.’

“It’s signed, ‘Time Boy strikes again.’”

Norman looked around, then back at the camera. “So, you *are* watching, Time Boy. I’m not even going to question how this piece of paper came to be in my hand, but-

Suddenly, another piece of paper appeared, in his other hand. Norman jerked back again. “Don’t question my methods’?” he said, quizzically. He regained composure, looked at the camera, and said, “That’s all. I’ve made my statements. Good day.”

Melissa pulled her tongue out of Clint’s mouth. “I have a question, for you, Time Boy.”

“Right *now*? I thought we were busy.” He pulled her mouth back to his and her naked body against him. “Can it wait?”

“Sure,” she mumbled, running a finger lightly down his stomach. She shifted her position slightly.

“Ah. Now that’s more like it. Oh, *God!*”

“You feel so good, baby.”

“Oh, don’t stop. And you feel better. Oh *yes.*”

Half an hour later, they were stretched out next to each other; their heads and shoulders propped up on pillows. Clint took a drag on his cigarette. “So, baby, you said you had a question for me?”

“Yeah.” Melissa turned toward him. “Actually, now I have two questions. One, what does this ability of yours mean, theologically speaking? And, two, what about our kids?”

“Hadn’t thought about it, baby. I guess it doesn’t add to or take away from the possibility of God’s existence. If there’s no God, then there’s some other explanation for this power I have. If there is a God, then maybe He gave it to me. But I’m not going to get a bigger head than I already have, thinking that I’m specially anointed by God for a mission. I just know I have something special, and I’m trying to be responsible with it, and help as many people as I can.”

“And our children?”

“What about them?”

“Do you think this ability is genetic? Or is it just something that comes along once in a million years, and this time, Fate chose you?”

He crushed out his cigarette. I don’t know baby. Do you mean will our children have a similar power?”

“Yeah. Like, ‘Time Boy Junior,’ or something.”

“I guess it’s possible. Or maybe it’s something that I can pass on to whomever I want. Maybe someone passed it on to me. Or maybe I was born in another galaxy, and my dad just adopted me, never knowing about this secret power that my people possessed.” He laughed, and leaned toward her. “I’m not going to worry about it, though. Not right now, I’m not.” He kissed her shoulder. “Now, let’s start time back up, and get some sleep.”

As soon as Melissa had fallen into a fitful sleep, Clint got up, and went into the other room, turning on his police scanner, with the volume down low.

“Who in the hell *are* you?” the young woman asked.

“Surely, you know that,” Time Boy replied.

“I know you’re Time Boy, and I know you just saved me from that nasty man. But who are you, really?”

Time Boy just grinned through his facemask. “Can you keep a secret?”

“You’re going to tell me who you are?” She looked dumbfounded.

“No. I’ll never tell anyone who I am. But I need your help.”

“What? Time Boy needs my help?”

“Never mind. See you on the evening news.” He turned to go.

“No, wait! I’ll do it. What do you need?”

He smiled. “Thank you. While I can get from one place to another mind-blowingly fast, I can’t be everywhere at once. If you see a crime about to happen, or in progress, call me. The secret that I need you to keep is this: you must never tell anyone the number, or that you called me. Can you do that?”

“Sure!”

“Because if the number gets out, I’ll just change it, and I’ll have to start all over again, okay?”

“Okay.”

“The call will be free, and I can guarantee that I’ll arrive faster than the police can. Even if I’m on the other side of the world, I’ll be there within seconds. But if you

give away the secret, then our little agreement will be over. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I won't give out your number. I'll call it if I have an emergency. And I won't tell anyone that I called you."

"All right." He pulled a tiny phone from a pocket. "Take this. This phone is yours to keep, unless you give away the secret, at which time I will take it back from you. You can use it for your own private phone calls – anything you like, as long as you keep my secret. It's paid for. To call me, just press and hold '1' for a full second. Your code name is Time Helper 31. You don't have to remember it because 'T.H.31' is printed on the back. When you call, give me your code name, your location, and what's going on. I'll be there in a jiffy. Now, I have to go."

"Thanks, Time Boy."

Clint repeated this over and again. He never gave anyone a code name with a number under thirty, because he didn't want any of them to think they had been the first. Within days, there was a network of more than forty people around southern and eastern Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and one person in Washington, D.C. A few of these "Time Helpers" were retired people, and promised to listen to a police scanner in their areas. Attached to each phone he had given out was piece of paper, telling the Time Helpers what kind of charger to buy, so their phone could always have a full charge.

Through his multiple false identities (all of them legal, according to the Boston computer), he had set up three different dummy corporations, and all the phones he handed out were assigned to those companies. His own phone – the one he carried with him at all times – was assigned to one of his false identities. None of the addresses on his false ID cards was correct, and the bills for all of Time Boy's telephones went to three different P.O. Boxes, at three different Post Offices around Boston.

He knew that all of this meant that there was a paper trail leading to Time Boy, but the only way the authorities could find that trail would be if one of his helpers told someone. Most of them wouldn't do that, he was sure, since he had saved either their lives, their dignity, or their property. And he didn't hand a phone out to just anyone. Also, he knew that if the heat began to come down on Time Boy, he could always start up another corporation, and shut down one of the old ones. He knew they couldn't catch Time Boy.

Melissa had the first phone, and was code-named "Time Helper 30." Of course, he told her that she should use her own name if she had to call. Before he had started handing out telephones, she had only called him once, when her car had broken down. He had been there within seconds of her time, and fixed her car. Now, she could call anytime.

He continued to live life as Boston's supercop, making arrests on his own, or with other officers around. Many of the other policemen were starting to radio for him, instead of calling the dispatcher for backup. When going about his duties as a police officer, he didn't stop time completely, because he didn't want anyone getting suspicious again. He did, however, slow time down a lot, so he could drive faster and with more control. And he used his abilities more than once, when apprehending a suspect.

When some of Boston's detectives, working with an FBI team, found an inroad into an organized crime syndicate, he was called in to be part of the team that took them down. When a Mafia assassin tried to take him out, he was seen by more than one witness to rush head on into the gunfire, and tackle the man, without ever drawing his weapon.

The media began to lose interest in Time Boy, since there were no new leads, and no interviews. But they regularly interviewed Clint Allen, regarding his arrests. And they still reported on Time Boy, whenever they knew he had been involved in anything. Clint began instructing his Time Helpers on what to say in an interview.

"Just tell them the truth, right up until the point where I offered you the phone. They don't need to know about that. In fact, if they did, it would just make my job more difficult. If you are interviewed, just let them know that I was here."

Gloryhounds continued to imitate Time Boy, and then reveal themselves, trying to cash in on the fame. And a few of them were taken into custody. Several hundred people showed up when NBC offered a cash reward for the real Time Boy, and a lot of them had interesting stories, but none were given the reward. A few were injured while trying to imitate him, and one was killed, in New York, falling from an apartment balcony, seven stories, to his death.

Several websites opened up, claiming to be the website of “the REAL Time Boy,” asking for contributions to the cause. Most of them made a lot of money before their originators were caught. The real Time Boy never asked for money. Of course, some of people he saved offered him some, just as the Bank of Boston had offered a reward for catching the bank robbers.

Once, Clint tracked down the address of man running a “real Time Boy” website, and gave him a piece of his mind. He demonstrated his ability to appear and disappear at will, and then turned the man in to the police of his city.

He also appeared in the middle of the night, in the jail cells of several incarcerated Time Boy imitators, telling them to straighten up their lives. It caused quite a stir when five inmates in the Boston City Jail simultaneously claimed to have seen Time Boy in their jail cells in the middle of the night. Their statements were taken.

Melissa finally finished Medical School, and had "Ph.D." added to the end of her name. She began interning at the brand new Hope Center hospital near Cambridge. Her parents both came to her graduation, and ate dinner in the Allen apartment. They were both much warmer toward Clint than they had been, eight years before, at the wedding. Mr. Miller had seen Clint's name in the Watkins newspaper, in a special article about law enforcement around the nation.

Truman Bernard Allen was born on the anniversary of Melissa's graduation from medical school. He was a healthy, fully developed boy, weighing a hair over eight pounds. The Hope Center Hospital allowed Melissa a month away from her internship to have her baby and to recover. Clint took two weeks paid vacation from the police force to stay at home with her – besides the fact that he could come home at any time, without anyone noticing that he had left work.

Melissa picked "Truman," since it was her father's middle name. She chose "Bernard" after her favorite author Bernard Augustine De Voto, a Pulitzer Prize winner and a former professor at Harvard University. Clint smilingly agreed, noting that the initials were the same as Time Boy's.

Melissa had smiled, saying, "I know, honey. It's a neat coincidence, don't you think?"

Clint's insurance had covered much of the cost of the pregnancy, and Melissa's parents had covered the rest. The Millers had also paid for a plane ticket for Clint's father, so he could go to Boston with them, to see the baby. Neither Clint nor his father knew his mother's present location, so she could not be notified of her new grandson's arrival. The other three grandparents, however, had a grand time, and the Millers took dozens of digital photographs.

Time Boy continued his operations.

"And now, the *President of the United States!*"

The camera focused on President Mildryth Van Wyck. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the United States. As many of you know, from ubiquitous media coverage, for the last three years, the northeastern portion of our country has played host to a man known merely as 'Time Boy.' This man has been popularly labeled 'a real life superhero,' and his actions show that this is close to the truth. He has appeared in hundred of documented cases, as well as thousands of unsubstantiated reports, saving lives, foiling criminals, and then disappearing into thin air – according to eyewitnesses."

The trim woman eyed the camera meaningfully. "The mayor of Boston has made several TV appearances, pleading with Time Boy to 'cease and desist'. Each time, seemingly by magic, a message has appeared in Mayor Norman's hand, from Time Boy. Each of these messages was a response to something the Mayor Norman had just said. The last two of these press conferences were held in a tightly secured location, with the mayor surrounded by armed police officers. Still, these mysterious messages appeared.

"For the last two years, scientists from various fields, eyewitnesses from varying events, theologians of widely differing faiths, government officials and members of several Federal law enforcement agencies have studied videotapes, gone over written accounts and discussed at lengths all of these incidents in an attempt to discover just what is happening. A few have suggested that Time Boy has developed some kind of machine that alters the normal time continuum, and others have suggested that it is a type of mental ability, similar to telepathy, clairvoyance or telekinesis, that allows Time Boy to respond to emergency calls faster than police. Still others have said that there are several men acting together as one 'Time Boy' giving the appearance of one man acting alone. No solid conclusions have been drawn as to the actual truth of the situation.

"It is now the opinion of the Federal Government that whatever the situation, Time Boy is an asset to our nation, and not a detriment. For three years, the city of Boston, Massachusetts and various Federal Agencies have spent large amounts of public money in the pursuit of Time Boy and information about him. I see no reason for this monumental waste to continue. We ask that the police forces of Boston, New York City, Washington, D.C., Cambridge, Albany, Dover, and other cities where Time Boy operates to stop worrying about Time Boy, unless he commits an actual crime against their city. I have spoken to the mayors of most of these cities, asking them to continue to document each case, in a special Time Boy file, and to send copies of these files to the new Time Boy Office here in Washington, D.C.

"I have also set up a one-eight hundred number for the public. Any sightings of Time Boy should be called in to this number. The number is 1-800-TIMEBOY. Information can also be sent to this office by e-mail, at whitehouse/timeboy.com. Please

do not e-mail or call the Time Boy Office unless you have actually seen Time Boy, or someone matching his description, so more federal funds will not be wasted.

“I would like to repeat that Time Boy is not believed to be a detriment to our nation. I have set up this office to study his activities, to collate information regarding him, and to broaden our knowledge of this new phenomenon, *not* to find out how to capture him.

“Time Boy, if you are watching this live broadcast, I would like to thank you for all your efforts. The crime rate in Boston has now decreased by fifty percent in the last three years. New York City has seen a fifteen percent decrease in violent crimes. Washington, D.C., has seen a twenty-five percent decrease in all crimes. The crime rate in our nation as a whole has dropped by almost ten percent – a miraculous achievement. “Also, I would like you to know that I received your message yesterday morning, and will make your statement.”

President Van Wyck held up a slip of paper. “I will now read from Time Boy’s statement. ‘To the citizens of the United States, and any international citizens who may be watching the President’s telecast: Please do not send money to any websites or addresses claiming to represent me. I, the real Time Boy, do not operate any websites, nor have I endorsed any. I thank you for the good intentions with which your money is sent, but I do not need it. If you or your family has extra money that you want to send to me, please find another worthy cause. You could spend this money on Christmas presents for your children, for a better vacation, or for your spouse. There are also hundreds of reputable charity organizations that will put your money to good use. Start a retirement fund, or give your extra funds to your religious organization, if you belong to any. Also, please do not try to stop crimes by yourself, unless there is no other recourse. When you see a crime in progress, call 9-1-1. I have not intended to set an example for others by my actions in crime prevention. The best ways to prevent crimes are as follows: first, do not commit any yourself. Second, teach your children to be law-abiding citizens. Third, don’t make it easy for a criminal to commit a crime against you. Leave your house or car locked when you are not in it, don’t flash large amounts of money in public places, be aware of your surroundings, take a self-defense course, and follow other tips available from your local law enforcement agencies. Thank you.’ And the message is signed, ‘Time Boy’.”

She put the paper down. “One more thing before I open the floor to questions. Time Boy, if you’re watching, I would like to meet with you in person. I guess the time and the place will be up to you.”

“Do you believe that?” Melissa turned off the TV. “She actually wants to meet you.” She spoke softly; little Truman was wrapped in blankets, sleeping on the couch next to her.

Clint handed her a cup of coffee. “It is amazing. I’ll bet you that thousands of people call the White House in the next few days, claiming to be Time Boy, and wanting a meeting. She’s smarter than that, though. She won’t make any appointments with them; she’ll wait for me to show up in the Oval Office. Which I can do, unless they lock it up really tight, with the keys on the inside.”

“Are you going to do it?” Melissa took a sip from her coffee.

“Probably. I think she’s sincere when she says they’re not trying to capture me. She probably wants to ask me some questions, and see if I’ll let the scientists talk to me or give a TV interview. I won’t let them do it. I can’t be captured, darling. Even if someone were to slip handcuffs on me while I was sleeping, I could stop time and get them off. When time restarted, they would think I had just disappeared again.”

“What if they locked you in a cell? They could shoot you with a tranquilizer dart and lock you up. How would you get out then?”

“For one thing, I could stop time before going unconscious. That way, the tranquilizer could wear off without them ever knowing about it. Then I could escape. But even if I was captured, surely there’d be some way of escaping. I’m not worried about that.”

“What are you worried about?”

He sat down beside her, and put his arm around her. “Honey, I’m worried about a lot of things. For one, I’m worried that people will start expecting me to show up for every major world disaster, like Superman, or something. The fact is, I’m limited by how much I know. The only way I’ve ever known a crime was in progress was by listening to the police scanner, or by getting a call from one of the Time Helpers. I don’t have an international intelligence organization that tells me what’s going on. What if some

terrorist situation developed in another country? How would I get there? Sure, I could take a boat or plane, but I don't know how to fly or pilot a ship. How would I refuel, if the trip were longer than the range of the vehicle? I was thinking that maybe President Van Wyck might be able to help me with some of those things. I mean, if they want to me intervene in situations like that.

"I'm also worried about something a little bigger than all of that."

"What is it, honey?" Melissa looked concerned and slid closer to him.

"I think that Time itself is seriously fu – I mean, screwed up." He looked at her. His face was more serious than she had ever seen it. "Honey, I'm not, well, I don't think I'm getting older."

"What? That's crazy. You're not even twenty-seven yet. You shouldn't expect to be getting too many signs of age."

"I know, but I've lived longer than twenty-seven years, baby. With all the relative time I've spent while Time was stopped, I should be about forty now. Instead, my body is about nineteen years old. I look almost exactly like I did in my student ID photo my first year at MIT. Sure, my hair and nails keep growing, but I don't have any wrinkles or gray hairs. *None.*"

"Like I said, baby, you're still young. Wait ten years, and then tell me you're not getting older."

Mildryth Van Wyck, the nation's second female president, sat at her desk in the Oval Office, going through some notes, and a stack of new legislation. The jacket of her business suit was hanging from the back of her chair, and her top two buttons were not latched. She was in 'casual mode.' A steaming mug of coffee sat on a presidential coaster to her left. A paper-thin video screen on the back of the desk was tuned to CNN, with the volume turned down low.

President Van Wyck was alone in the room, but she knew she wasn't *really* alone. She knew there were two Secret Service agents standing just outside the door, and two more keeping an eye on the security camera monitors. In her peripheral vision, she could see other agents on the lawn. She knew that there were alarms on the windows and doors. Only a very few people could open the door to her office with their fingerprint; the rest had to wait for an authorized person to open the door – otherwise they would set off an alarm.

That was why she was more than mildly surprised to become suddenly aware of another presence in the room. When she raised her eyes, she smiled. "Well, hello, Time Boy. How nice of you to show up. Won't you sit down?"

He made no move to locate a chair, knowing that his time here was short. He spoke quickly and firmly. "Madam President, I know that I have now been seen on your security cameras. Within seconds, agents will be crowding into this room. Call them off. Now."

Just then, the door opened, and agents began to rush in. "Stop!" she commanded them. "I am okay."

The four agents, two of whom had already drawn their weapons, came to a halt a few feet from Time Boy. The highest ranking of them said, "Ma'am? This man is not authorized--"

"Stow it," she said. "All of you have been briefed. I told you that the *real* Time Boy would not make an appointment. As you can see, he is here. As you can also see, he is not armed. I am fine. Now, leave us."

The ranking agent motioned with his hand, and the four agents retreated out of the Oval Office.

"Thank you," Time Boy said. "I assure you, you have nothing to fear from me; my intentions are benign."

"I know that," she said calmly. "Now, will you please sit down?"

He did so.

"And will you kindly remove your mask? I don't find it very polite of you to keep your identity from me."

"I apologize, Ma'am, but I cannot let my identity be known, not even to you. Surely you of all people understand strict security measures."

"I do understand security, sir, and I can assure you that you are secure. I doubt your face is one that I will recognize, and I assure you that no one outside this building will ever see it because of me."

"I believe you," he said, "but secrets have leaked from this building before. The only way I will remove this mask is if the two of us are completely alone, in a place of my

choosing – where I know that there are no cameras or other recording devices. I know of such a place.”

“Skip it,” she said, dismissing the subject. “I don’t have the time. Thank you for coming, though; I have a few questions for you.”

“I guessed as much.”

“How do you do it?”

Time Boy appeared mildly stunned that she had gotten to the heart of the matter without beating around the bush. “I suppose you are referring to the appearing and disappearing stunts.” He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of a pocket. “Do you mind if I smoke?”

She grimaced. “The White House, as you know, is a non-smoking facility, as are all government buildings.”

“It’s also your home. Surely you can make an exception for me.”

She reached into a lower drawer, and pulled out an ashtray bearing the presidential seal. She set it on the desk. Time Boy took the ashtray and returned to his seat.

“Thank you.” He carefully lit his cigarette, and took a deep drag. “I’m only going to tell you this because I respect your office, and you, personally, and to put a rest to all the speculation. I don’t really like being the center of attention.”

“I understand.” She looked down at a notebook on her desk, then looked up at him. “How long is this going to take? I have some appointments coming up.”

“No time at all.” He stopped Time for both of them.

“What do you mean?”

“Look outside, Ma’am.” He pointed out the window. “Those two agents – they were walking across the lawn. Now they’re not moving. That’s how I do it. You will have also noticed that you no longer hear the air conditioning system or the wind blowing by the windows. It has all stopped. You and I and this smoke are the only things in the world that are moving at all.”

Her expression, normally a carefully controlled one, began to change. Her eyes widened slightly, and her mouth began to drop open. After a short moment, she regained control. “Well, I’ll be damned,” she said in a low voice.

He let go of his cigarette. “As you can see, nothing else is experiencing Time.” The cigarette hung in mid-air, and the smoke coming from it became still, locked in time. “I discovered the ability when I was much younger, and I have grown more accustomed to using it ever since. Now, we can talk as long as we want, and no one will bother us. No time will go by, and you will miss none of your appointments. This is the place I spoke of when I said I trust that no one is watching.”

Time Boy removed his mask, and ran a hand through his short brown hair. “Your cameras will record nothing while Time is not moving, and I will replace the mask before I allow time to go on.”

President Mildryth Van Wyck stared at Clint Allen for a few moments. Finally, she found her voice. “You’re awfully young.”

“I’m older than I look, Ma’am, although I can’t tell you how old. If I did, that would only give you information by which to find out my true identity.”

“Of course. Still, I ask, ‘how do you do it?’ How do you stop time?”

“That I cannot explain. I can slow it down by varying degrees, which gives the appearance that I am moving very quickly. Or I can stop it altogether.” As she reached for her coffee, he quickly included it in their ‘time bubble’, so it would be hot. “That gives me the appearance of disappearing or appearing. When I walked into your office, I had stopped Time completely, so the alarm on the door didn’t go off. I pushed the door open without any trouble, since the magnetic locks do not work without Time. I re-closed the door before restarting Time. That way, the alarm system never knew that the door had been open.”

“Hmm. And you say you don’t know how you do it?”

“That’s right. I mean, I know that it’s a mental ability; I don’t use a machine of any kind. I don’t understand many of the related scientific questions, either, only the implications. I listen to police scanners, and respond to emergencies.”

“If you live in or near Boston – or wherever you live – how do you know when there’s an situation going on in another city?”

“I don’t, usually. The first few times I acted in other cities, I just went there. I stopped Time completely, and drove to a different city. With Time not moving, I can walk or drive around the entire city, looking for a crime scene. If I don’t find any, I move on to another city. I’ve read the statistics, so I know that most violent crimes happen at certain

times of the day. So, I can stop time during that period, and go to New York. I can traverse the entire length and breadth of the city without a second of real time passing. And, in New York, there's almost *always* a crime being committed – of one kind or another."

She leaned forward, her mind clicking into high gear. "You said you drive to these other cities. But if Time is completely stopped, how does your car run?"

"I can include whatever object or objects that I want. Like you, for instance. When I stopped Time, I included you in what I call 'my personal time bubble.' At the present time, your coffee mug is also included. Otherwise, the coffee wouldn't be hot." He pulled his cigarette out of the air where it had been hanging. The smoke started to move again. He took a deep drag, and exhaled.

"Here's a tough one. Can you slow or stop time for another object, without slowing or stopping it for you? Also, can you move forward or backward in Time?"

His eyes widened a little. "I'll answer your second question first. I've never tried to go forward or backward in Time. I'm afraid of the consequences. Say, for instance, tomorrow I decide to go back in Time one full day. That means that today I might run into myself. I don't know if I would like it. And if I went forward in time, I'm afraid that I couldn't get back to *now*. The first question, I can't answer, because I've never even thought about it. For instance, if I were to restart Time for you and I, but leave your coffee cup in my 'time bubble', it might very well disappear. Because the coffee cup would never make it into the next instant. Now, if I just slowed time for the coffee cup, and we returned to normal, it might be extremely hot, or extremely cold. I'm not sure how that would work. It would probably pour out much faster than normal, as if gravity were much stronger for it."

"Try it," Van Wyck said, holding out a pen. He took it. "Include that pen in your 'time bubble' – as you call it – and then restart Time for us. Don't worry, I have plenty of them."

Clint shrugged, and brought the pen into the time bubble with him. He wrote on his hand just a little bit, to make sure the pen worked. "Okay, Ma'am, here goes." After replacing his mask, he let Time began to move at a very slow creep.

The pen promptly did nothing out of the ordinary. He shrugged. "I guess it doesn't work. The time bubble only exists if I'm in it." He tried the pen on his hand. It still wrote. "Here." He handed it back to her, stopped time again, and removed his mask.

"Any other questions?"

She thought for a moment. "You say you can drive your car while Time is stopped. Could you, say, fly a plane or conn a ship while time is stopped?"

"I could if I knew how. Or if I brought the appropriate personnel into my time bubble. If you had a sticky situation overseas, I could be there in an instant, if I had the right person to fly a plane for me. I could stop time, and be there before the situation developed any further. For that matter, I could – right now – go into the office of any head of state of any country, just as I walked into this one. If it were your intention – and mine – we could rule the world. But it's not my intention. My intention is to continue to live my life, and continue doing what I'm doing."

"I see. Would you, in fact, cooperate with us, if I asked you to help out with a terrorist situation?"

"I could."

"How would I contact you? You say you don't have a website, or e-mail address. Do you have a phone number that I can call?"

He had already thought about the possibility that she would ask that question. "Yes. And the man that answers that phone will be able to get in touch with me immediately. However, I must have your word that you will be the only one who has this phone number."

"What if I am in the middle of the terrorist activity? How would anyone else get in touch with you?"

"Name one person that you can trust implicitly not to investigate the number or leak this information, and who also never travels with you."

"My husband. He has never once traveled with me outside of this country, and doesn't like to. Also, I trust him with everything. He knows more secrets about this country than any president's spouse before him."

"Okay. I will give you the number, and trust that you will give it to him, and him alone. If anyone else calls that number, no one will speak to them, and the number will be changed immediately. There will be no traceable connection between the old number and the new one."

“You have my word.”

“Is there anything else you’d like to ask me?”

“No. Keep up the good work.”

“I will.” With that, he disappeared, leaving nothing but a dissipating cloud of smoke. The ashtray appeared on her desk, completely cleaned – there was no trace of the butt or ashes. Or of Time Boy. She noted that the agents were once again walking across the lawn, and that the sounds had returned.

As the years continued to roll by, Time Boy came to be a household name, much like John Wayne, Neil Armstrong and Chuck Yeager had once been. There was a slew of babies named with the initials T.B., across the nation. Children who had never seen or heard of John Wayne were reading Time Boy comic books, watching the Saturday morning Time Boy cartoons, and playing with plastic Time Boy action figures. From the gross sales of these items, one penny on every dollar went to the White House Time Boy Office, which continued to study time control and other time phenomenon. Unknown to most of the country, the Time Boy office took only half on one penny on the dollar from those sales. The other half went into a safe in the President's private office – a safe to which only two people had the combination: the President and Time Boy.

In the first year of this arrangement, Time Boy took in more than three million dollars. Much of this money, he gave to charities, in anonymous donations. The rest of it he used to continue paying telephone bills for his Time Helpers. There were more than two hundred of them now all along the eastern seaboard, and a few scattered through the rest of the country. Only two of them had ever said anything to anyone about their arrangement with Time Boy. Both of them had suddenly found that their Time Helper telephones were missing, and that the number they had been calling went to an warehouse in Winthrop, Massachusetts, and the woman answering the phone claimed to know nothing about Time Boy.

Clint Allen continued to work for the Boston Police Department, where he refused several promotions to detective. Melissa continued to work at Hope Center Hospital, delivering babies. The two of them raised Truman Bernard Allen as best they could. Clint's father sent a manuscript to a publishing company that Melissa's mother recommended, and had a book of short stories published. Shortly after that, he had two books of poems published, then another novel.

Mildryth Van Wyck was reelected President, shortly after using Time Boy to save an airliner that had been hijacked by terrorists over the Pacific Ocean. No one knew how he did it, but somehow Time Boy had appeared inside the Boeing 797, only minutes after having been seen in New York City. In less than a minute, he had subdued all four terrorists, using tranquilizer darts – supplied by the federal government – and had returned control of the plane to the captain. The President of American Airlines, along with many passengers, thanked Time Boy on national television. The President of the United States thanked him in person, on international television.

Clint and Melissa bought a house, with a small yard, in one of Boston's finer suburbs. It meant that the drive to work would be longer for both of them, but it meant that they would have room for little Truman to grow and develop as a child should.

In the next presidential election, the U.S.A. elected her first African-American President, Dr. Horace Glover, of California. Shortly after his inauguration, he met behind closed doors with former President Van Wyck, and Time Boy. He was given a demonstration of Time Boy's abilities, and the phone number was turned over to him. The combination on the safe was changed, and the new one given only to Time Boy and the new President. The Van Wycks promised never to reveal the number.

"I think you were right," Melissa said one night, two years into Glover's administration.

"About what?" Clint wanted to know.

"Remember a few years ago, when you said you weren't getting any older? I don't think you are. Your driver's license says you're thirty-four, but you still look nineteen to me. And your stamina hasn't dulled any, either."

"I know," he replied, smoking a cigarette. "I'm starting to wonder about something else, too."

"What's that?" She lit one of her own, since Truman was playing outside.

"I don't think you're getting any older." He looked at her steadily, gauging her reaction to his statement.

She didn't act too surprised. "I think you're right about that too, baby. I noticed that after Truman was born, I returned to my pre-pregnancy weight in a matter of weeks. And my stretch marks have gone away. I should be thirty-four, just like you, but I seem to be holding at twenty-four. That's how old I was when you first stopped time

for me. I still have to cut my hair and nails, just like you, but there are no signs of aging. Not one wrinkle, not one gray hair. Although, I'm not too worried about it."

Clint dropped his cigarette, and quickly scooped it up before it hit the floor. His mouth was hanging open. "Oh, *shit!*"

"What's wrong, baby?" She stood up, and came over to him.

"Do you think it happens to everyone that I bring into my time bubble? If so, that means Van Wyck and President Glover aren't going to get any older, either. Who else?"

She thought for a moment. "You've never brought any of your suspects into the time bubble, have you?"

"*Shit, shit, shit!* Remember when I went into those jail cells, a few years ago? Those guys who had been arrested for imitating Time Boy? I stopped time for all of them! I wanted the reports to show that they had all been visited at the same time, so I didn't let any time go by; I just brought them into my time bubble one at a time. That means that none of them are going to age."

"Maybe." Melissa was thinking hard. "Maybe it doesn't have to do with the time bubble. Maybe it's something else. Maybe you've done a mental thing subconsciously. When you noticed that you yourself weren't aging, you wished that I could join you in immortality, and subconsciously gave me the same gift."

"Hmm. I supposed that's possible." Clint slid out of her grasp and went to the couch, where he sat down. She followed him. He turned to her. "We have to find out, honey. I need to make a visit to the Van Wyck house. I have their address around here, somewhere."

"Clint."

"Yeah."

"Who else? You need to make a detailed list of everyone for whom you stopped time. Every suspect, every political figure – everyone. Even those two patients of mine that you slowed time for."

"I didn't stop time for them, remember? I just slowed it down."

"You still need to check."

Several visits told a chilling tale: There were several people who were not getting any older. Mildryth Van Wyck even seemed to have gotten younger. She had been attributing it to her new exercise routine and regular usage of new vitamins, but when she saw Clint's face, she knew the truth. She could see that he had not aged a day since she had first met him, six years before. He could see that some of her worry lines had smoothed out, and that her hair seemed fuller and more vibrant.

The two patients for whom he had slowed time did not appear to have gotten any younger, however, and one of them had several new gray hairs. On the other hand, the one Time Boy imitator that he could find just smiled at him.

"I wondered how long it would take you to find me," the man said. He stepped out of his plumbing van in the middle of the street when he noticed that all of the cars had ceased motion. "I figured out your secret not long after I saw you in my cell. A few years later, I figured out something else."

Clint looked at his face. He really couldn't remember what the man had looked like before, but the man did seem to have a vibrant sheen about him. "You're not getting any older," he said.

"That's right. In fact, the bad knee I've had since high school has cleared up, and I'm losing weight too." He patted his trim stomach. "I haven't worn glasses in two years, and I can eat whatever I want. At first, I just thought it was God's way of rewarding me for straightening out my life. Then I started wondering. It all started when you came into my cell."

Time Boy shook his head at the man. "So, you're not worried by this?"

"What? Why should I be worried?" The man shrugged. "I don't know if this means I'm just going to live longer, or if I'm going to live forever, but I like it so far."

"You're not worried that you'll outlive everyone you love? Or that your friends won't notice that they're all getting old and dying, while you're still thirty-something?"

"For one thing, Time Boy – whoever you are, I don't have any family. If anyone I know starts to get suspicious, I'll just move to another city." Suddenly, his eyes lit up. "I bet you'll even help me get set up in a new town, won't you? You don't want this secret getting out either, do you?"

Time Boy shrugged. "If you won't tell, I won't. But please believe that I had no idea that it would happen."

“Quite all right.”

As far as Clint and Melissa could tell, there were now twelve people who were not going to get any older; in fact, some of them were getting younger. The two presidents, the five inmates that Clint had visited in the middle of the night, Clint, Melissa, and the crew of the helicopter that had flown Time Boy to the airliner while time was stopped.

“You can’t do it anymore, Clint.” Melissa was holding his shoulders.

“Do what? You mean I have to quit being Time Boy?” He stepped back. “It’s the third best thing I’ve ever done in my life, next to marrying you and fathering Truman.”

“Well, baby, I wasn’t thinking of that, although it’s something to think about. No, I mean you can’t stop Time for anyone else, anymore. If you bestow a longer life upon someone every time you stop time for them, who knows what the consequences could be. Besides, we don’t yet know whether you’ve just given us all a longer, healthier life, or if it’s actually immortality. If it’s necessary, just slow time down so much that it seems like it’s stopped. Most people won’t be able to tell the difference, and spectators’ eyes don’t work that fast. Until then, we need to study what’s happened to us.” She pulled him toward the couch, and sat him down. Then she said in a low voice, “Do you really think it’s immortality?”

He grinned. “I guess there’s no way to prove that. Even if you live for a thousand years, you’ll never know if you’re going to die the next day.”

“I guess that’s true.” Melissa started to settle back into the couch, and then suddenly she sat upright. “Clint, have you ever stopped time for Truman?”

He didn’t even stop to think. “Damn. Yes, I did. Right after he was born, I stopped time, and just held him for a while. But he’s still growing up. Maybe it didn’t work for him.”

Melissa shook her head. “There’s no way of knowing, Clint. You stayed the same age, physically. I reverted a little. And you said Mrs. Van Wyck is getting younger. Maybe whatever it is, it brings you back to a certain age, and if you’re younger, it waits until you’re grown up to have any effect. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

When Truman entered the second grade, his little sister, Tiffany Belle Allen was born. Clint then accepted his promotion to detective, and Melissa quit working at Hope Center. Clint and Melissa were both 35 years old.

Epilogue

As time went on, Clint Allen grew no older, and neither did his wife Melissa. After a few years, he began adding gray coloring to his hair, and stopped moving so fast at work. Truman Bernard Allen eventually reached physical adulthood and graduated from high school. After that, he appeared to grow no older. Six years later, Tiffany Belle Allen also graduated high school. She, too, ceased to age. Clint and Melissa sat down with them one evening, and explained it all to them, and told them that Clint was Time Boy.

Former President Mildryth Van Wyck stopped making public appearances a few years after her last presidential term. Occasionally, she received visits from Time Boy, and, after her husband died, he revealed his true identity to her. After that, she visited the Allens – incognito – rather often. Clint provided her with a new identity, so she could get a new job – she now appeared to be in her twenties, although she had been in her fifties when elected President.

President Glover served only one term, then retired into obscurity. Within years, he only appeared to be twenty-something as well. Clint provided him with a new identity as well, and he re-enrolled in college, setting several collegiate football records.

Of the five Time Boy imitators who had accidentally been made immortal, Clint only located three. One of the others was killed in a shootout, and the fifth one, a Farris Kane, was never found.

Of the crew of the military helicopter, two were killed in a UN peacekeeping action in eastern Europe, and the other retired from the military, and became Time Boy's assistant.

Time Boy continued to assist police forces along the eastern seaboard of the United States.

A permanent international space station was constructed in Earth orbit. The international space organization sent a team of astronauts and scientists to Mars, where a permanent base was established. Mining began on the Moon, where a factory was soon built.

International borders changed, small wars were fought. New medical practices were developed. Electric cars soon became more prominent than gas-burning automobiles. Aerospace engineers designed and built the first solar-powered airliners and cargo planes. The population of the Earth passed seven, then eight billion.

Still, Time Boy did not go away. Over forty years, twelve Time Boy movies were released, a Time Boy TV drama came and went, and several Time Boy animated series kept children occupied on Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons. Time Boy continued to receive one cent on the dollar for all the earnings of these companies, through the President's office. The Time Boy Office had discovered nothing about time control, so it was disbanded after a few years.

When Clint Allen retired from the Boston Police Department, he took his pension in the "lump sum" arrangement, and moved his family out of town. Before retiring, he had provided all of his family with new IDs and records, showing a much younger age for all of them. Using some of Time Boy's money, he bought an estate in the country, with a large house.

To save money, Time Boy evaluated each of his Time Helpers. Several had never called, either because they'd never witnessed another emergency, or for some other reasons. All of their phones were reacquired. Others, who had only made one or two calls during two dozen years, also had their phones retrieved. A few had died, and their phones were shut off as well. Those who had called regularly, giving Time Boy a lot of action, had their phones upgraded to the new satellite phones. For one yearly fee, these new phones could be used to call anywhere in the world from anywhere in the world, without airtime charges.

Mildryth Van Wyck eventually moved into the Allen estate, and spent much of her time answering phones for Time Boy. Shortly after Truman Allen's first wife died, he moved back to his father's house and married the former President, since they now appeared to be about the same age. They were married for twenty years, then divorced, to seek mortal wives.

Tiffany Belle, after getting a law degree, practiced law in New York City for twenty-five years, amassing quite a bit of money, then moved back to the Allen estate. There, she married the ex-military man who was helping Time Boy. They were married for forty years, then he was killed in an automobile accident; the traffic control computer had failed. She did not marry for some time after that.

Two hundred years after Clint discovered that he could stop time, he was still healthy and appeared to be very young. Humans were living permanently on the Moon, Mars, and Jupiter's satellite Ganymede. The oceans were being harvested for food, and for fresh water. Several deserts around the world had been irrigated and farmed. More than a dozen cities floated on the surface of the world's oceans, providing homes for millions of people. Many city builders had begun digging into the Earth's crust, since surface area was growing rare.

Every human born on Earth was entered into international computers only minutes after exiting the womb. Fingerprints, DNA samples, and retinal patterns were on file for all ten billion people. Except Clint. Through his affiliation with the President of the United States, and later, the President of the Terran Federation, he was allowed to forego this identification.

When the international interstellar spacecraft *Bon Voyage* began construction, Clint signed up. He explained to his family that they would soon be discovered on Earth, and probably persecuted. At the very least, they would have to undergo endless scientific and medical experiments.

Not only that, he said they should go somewhere that their special attributes would be needed. A thousand people were going to ride on the *Bon Voyage*, to another solar system, where they would colonize an earthlike planet that had been discovered.

With a little help from his friends at the White House and the Terran Federation HQ, Clint acquired passes for fifty-two people – all of his family. There were not only the original immortals, but also the children born into the family had been gifted with it. The five children born to Mildryth and Truman, Truman's two children by mortal wives, Tiffany's four children with her immortal husband, and six children by two mortal husbands. Clint and Melissa had parented four more children of their own, and most of these children had had children of their own. There were several generations, all with false identities, and a free ride out of the solar system.

And so, when the *Bon Voyage* exited the solar system, fifty-two of the one thousand colonists were immortals. All of them had spent time studying for and practicing various skills that would be useful on the colonial journey. On board ship, all of them had regular housekeeping duties, just like everyone else. Melissa worked in the ship's infirmary, Clint was a security officer, Tiffany worked in the childcare center, Truman was one of the engineers working with the power plant, and Mildryth was in charge of one of the ship's "neighborhoods".

During the two hundred-year journey, all of the other colonists eventually died, passing on their jobs to their children. There had been some intermarrying between the immortals and mortals, and all of the children were granted immortality. When the *Bon Voyage* reached her destination, the ship held 124 immortals, and 1356 mortals.

The colonization was successful, although many died in the beginning, from infectious diseases. There, the Allen family and associated immortals lived for the next thousand years or more.

Time Boy Timeline (In Real Time)

- 2000, Nov. 1: birth of William Clint Allen (father: William Charles Allen, hometown: Watkins, TN)
- 2019, Jan.: discovered Time Control Ability (TCA), began dating Melissa Miller
- 2019, June 2: Clint & Melissa graduate from high school
- 2019, Aug.: Clint & Melissa get married & move to Boston, MS, where he enrolls in MIT, and she enrolls at Harvard University, Cambridge
- 2021, Aug.: Clint begins attending Police Academy outlet classes at night, in Boston
- 2023, May 25: Clint graduates Police Academy, applies with the Boston Police Department
- 2023, June 3: Clint graduates MIT, bachelor's degree, computer engineering
- 2023, June 5: Melissa receives bachelor's degree, enrolls in Harvard's medical school
- 2023, Sept.: Clint's first arrest using TCA
- 2025, Aug.: Clint is suspended from the Boston PD for two weeks, investigated by Internal Affairs

THE ADVENT OF TIME BOY

- 2026, Aug.: Boston's mayor John Norman's prime time press conference, asking Time Boy to quit
- 2026, Sept.: Time Boy begins recruiting 'Time Helpers'
- 2027, June 4: Melissa receives Ph.D. from Harvard Medical School, begins interning at Hope Center Hospital
- 2028, June 4: Truman Bernard Allen is born at Hope Center Hospital, 8 lbs., ¼ oz.
- 2028, July 9: U.S. President Mildryth Van Wyck's international press conference; she asks police to stop looking for Time Boy, and reads his statement on TV, then asks for a meeting
- 2028, July 12: Time Boy meets with the President
- 2028, Oct.: Time Boy saves American Airlines flight 2323 from terrorists
- 2028, Nov.: Mildryth Van Wyck reelected President
- 2032, Nov.: Dr. Horace Glover elected as US's first black president
- 2034, Time Boy discovers the side effect of stopping Time – immortality
- 2035, Aug.: Truman Bernard enters second grade
- 2035, Sept. 2: Tiffany Belle Allen is born at Hope Center Hospital, 7 lbs., 7 oz.
- 2226, Clint Allen, along with the other immortals and his entire family, leave the solar system on *Bon Voyage*
- 2425, *Bon Voyage* arrives at her destination, and the immortals help colonize