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Excerpt from
The Tomorrow Code (2008)

Chapter 1 **The End**

The end of the world started quietly enough for Tane Williams and Rebecca Richards, lying on their backs on a wooden platform on Lake Lucas Foot. Which wasn't really a lake at all.

Lucas Foot Primary School was set in a small valley. A nice little suburban valley. A hundred years ago it had been a nice little swamp where Pukekos and Black Stilts had competed for the best nesting positions, and croak-less native frogs had snared insects with their flicking tongues. But now it was a nice little suburban valley, surrounded by nice little homes belonging to nice little home-owners who painted their fences and paid their taxes and never gave any thought to the fact that when it rained, all the water that ran through their properties, also ran through the properties below, and the properties below those, and so on until it reached the lowest point of the valley floor. Which happened to be Lucas Foot Primary School.

As a consequence, Lucas Foot Primary School had to have very good drainage. When it rained hard, as it often did in the west of Auckland, an awful lot of that rain made its way down from the hillsides surrounding the school and ended up on the playing fields and netball courts of the small, but cheerful Primary School.

And sometimes the water, sauntering its way down the slopes with a mind and a cheeky personality of its own, would playfully pick up some odds and ends along the way with a view to blocking those very good drains that the council had put in many years ago after the first and second (and possibly the third) time that the school had flooded.

Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. It depended on what the water happened to find in its path to block the drains with. Little sticks and paper food-wrappings just washed right down through the big metal grills of the drains. Small branches, stones and other large objects generally just ended up at the bottom of their homeowners' nice little properties.

But light twigs and pieces of plastic sailed merrily down on the surface of the water, and blocked the drains beautifully when entangled together over the drain covers.

That was what had happened this particular time, and the soccer/rugby/hockey/bullrush fields of Lucas Foot Primary School were covered in at least eight centimetres of muddy water, high enough to lap at the door-steps of the cheerful little classrooms across the way, but fortunately not quite high enough to get inside.

Tane and Rebecca lay on their backs on the small wooden platform in the centre of the two main playing fields and looked up at the stars, for the rain had stopped many hours ago, and the night was clear and beautiful.

Neither of them were pupils of Lucas Foot Primary, in fact both of them were far too old to attend primary school, and for another fact, both of them went to West Auckland Grammar, which was a high school and not a primary school at all.

However when they were primary school kids, they had both gone to Lucas Foot, which was why they knew that when it rained really hard during the day, and stopped at night, it became a magical, wonderful place to be.

The stars above shone down with a piercing intensity that penetrated the haze of lights from the suburban homes around the valley. The moon too, was lurking about, turning the weathered wood of the small platform to silver. All around them the lights from the sky above reflected in the inky blackness that was Lake Lucas Foot. The lake that sometimes appeared where the playing fields were after a particularly heavy rainstorm.

There were stars above, and stars below, rippling slowly in the light breeze, and it was like being out in the centre of the universe, floating through space on your back.

Tane and Rebecca thought it was the coolest place to be. On Lake Lucas Foot. After the rain.

Tane tossed a pebble into the air, and there was a satisfying plop a few seconds later as it landed. They both raised their heads to see the widening circles of ripples, shaking the foundations of the stars around them, then, as if controlled by the same puppeteer, they both put their heads back down together.

Tane's feet were pointing one way, and Rebecca's were pointing the other, so that the tops of their heads were just about touching. If they had been boyfriend and girlfriend they might have lay down side by side, but they weren't, so they didn't.

From an open window, in a house, somewhere on the surrounding slopes, an old Joni Mitchell folk song reached out plaintively across the water to them.

Rebecca said again (for a whole conversation had been going on while we had been examining the surroundings), 'Time travel is impossible.' She said it more firmly this time as if that were simply the end of the discussion and the judge's decision was final and no correspondence would be entered into.

Now ordinarily Tane would have given up at that point, because Rebecca was almost certainly right. After all it was Rebecca, and not Tane, who had aced her NCEA Level One Physics, the top student in the entire country, at the age of just fourteen! Which had been no real surprise to Tane who had been in the same class as his friend as she had confounded science teacher after science teacher, and maths teacher after maths teacher, by somehow, instinctively, knowing as much about the subject they were teaching as they did.

Some teachers enjoyed having Rebecca in their class because she was very, very clever, if a little rebellious and uncontrollable at times. But some other teachers found it very stressful to have a girl among their students who took great delight in correcting them whenever they made mistakes. Which was more often than you'd think.

So if Rebecca said that time travel was impossible, then time travel was impossible. But there was something about the stars that night. Something about their slow drift through the heavens above and below them, something about the beautifully random, and randomly beautiful patterns they made: salt-sprinkles on a black satin table cloth.

Or then again, it might just have been that Tane liked to argue, and he especially liked to argue with Rebecca.

'I read a book once,' Tane said, 'I can't remember what it was called, but it was about these grad students who go back in time to mediaeval days to rescue a missing historian and they fight...'

‘Timeline,’ interrupted Rebecca, who also loved a good argument, and especially enjoyed showing that she knew more than Tane, ‘Michael Crichton, 1999.’

‘Yeah, that’s it. But anyway, they manage to create this... like... pinprick in the fabric of time somehow and then they kind of transmit themselves through it.’

‘I know. I read it,’ said Rebecca, and then, perhaps because she realised that she was sounding a bit negative, she said, ‘I mean the science was quite good in it, about the fabric of space-time, and that stuff they called Quantum Foam, all the way up to the part where they transmit themselves through this tiny hole into the past.’

Tane twisted his head around to look at her, but it hurt, and all he could see were the spiky blonde pointy bits of her punky haircut, so he twisted back again. He thought for a moment. True, he wasn’t as good at maths and sciences as she was, but then, most of their teachers weren’t as good at maths and sciences as she was. Tane’s strengths were in art, and English, and he was a school legend on the blues harp, but even so the time travel thing sounded at least feasible to him.

‘Why?’ he asked eventually, ‘Why couldn’t they transmit themselves?’

‘Try to think logically,’ Rebecca said firmly, but not unkindly. ‘How could you transport a live human being through a pin hole of any kind?’

‘What about a fax machine!’ Tane said suddenly. ‘You put a piece of paper in at one place and it gets sent along a telephone wire and it comes out in another place.’

‘No it doesn’t.’

‘Yes it does,’ said Tane, starting to get into the argument, even though he knew she was going to turn out to be right.

‘No it doesn’t,’ repeated Rebecca, ‘A copy of the piece of paper comes out. The actual piece of paper you sent stays right where it was. All you are sending is an electronic image of the paper, just like a digital photograph of it. Fax is short for facsimile and facsimile means copy.’

She knew a lot of things, did Rebecca.

‘So...um,’ Tane was losing and he knew it.

‘We can transmit pictures, sound, even movies, through wires, or through the air in radio waves. But we can’t transmit a solid object. Not even a piece of paper.’

And that was pretty much the end of the conversation for the moment. They stayed on the platform for a while longer. Neither of them really wanted to go home, for reasons of their own. They talked about school a bit, and made some jokes about some of the people in their classes, and it was about ten o’clock, after they had sloshed their way through Lake Lucas Foot back to the road, that Tane resumed the argument, as if they had never left off. Which just showed that he had been quietly thinking about it the whole time.

‘Well if we can’t transmit people through time, what about sounds, pictures and movies, like you said.’

Rebecca had to actually think about that for a moment, which was a small victory for Tane. He pulled out his blues harp and played a slow blues riff while they walked.

‘Nope.’ She said at last. ‘If I understand the science right,’ and Tane thought she probably did, ‘then you could only send stuff backwards. You couldn’t transmit to the future because that hasn’t happened yet.’

‘So...?’

‘So let’s say we invented some kind of radio transmitter that could broadcast through time. Something that could transmit messages through the quantum foam.’

‘Yeah?’

‘Well what would be the point? Because in the past they wouldn’t have invented a radio receiver that could pick up the transmission, so nobody could listen to the messages we were sending!’

‘Oh.’ said Tane, thinking that Rebecca, as usual, made perfect sense.

They reached Rebecca’s house and stopped.

All the lights were off, but one of the windows flickered blue with the glow of a television. Her mum was watching TV, which was no great surprise, because that was pretty much all her mum did all day, and all night. At least since her dad had died.

‘Oh.’ said Tane again, pointlessly, and glanced up at the sky just in time to catch the brief flash of a shooting star.

That was when the inspiration struck him, or at least that was when he told everyone afterwards. That was the moment when it all seemed so clear.

‘So what if someone in the future had already invented a time radio transmitter, and was sending messages back to the past, waiting for someone to invent a receiver?’

He wasn’t sure if that sounded silly or not, so just waited for the usual rebuff from his friend.

It didn’t come.

‘What’s that again?’

‘Well, lets just say that some time in the future, maybe hundreds of years from now, someone invents one of those transmitters you were talking about. And just say they were sending out messages, through that foamy stuff, just waiting for someone in the past to invent a receiver.’

‘Well, I... um...’

‘What if we built a receiver and just listened. Just waited for a signal from the future.’

‘Well, the whole concept of quantum foam is not even proven. And I wouldn’t have the slightest idea how to build a receiver.’ Rebecca mused. ‘But it’s an interesting idea.’

That may not have sounded like much, but it wasn’t very often that Rebecca thought that Tane had an interesting idea, so it was kind of an important day, if only for that reason.

Although, with hindsight, it was actually an important day for much bigger reasons than that.

‘See ya mate,’ Rebecca called, and skipped up the driveway towards her darkened house.

Tane looked after her for a while, until she disappeared into the carport and inside her home.

‘See ya mate,’ he called softly, long after she was gone.

Super Freak (2005)

1. Forward – Mind Matters

Where do thoughts come from?

You know, like you're sitting in maths and the teacher is droning on about isosceles triangles and suddenly into your mind pops the thought that you'd really like a big date scone with jam and whipped cream. Which has nothing to do with isosceles triangles.

Or you're sitting on the bus on the way home from school and all at once you imagine that the bus is going to lift off the ground like a UFO and fly out into orbit.

Where do thoughts like that come from? I don't know. I'm not a scientist, or a psychologist or anything like that. I'm just a kid. But I do know where some thoughts come from. Like the time that Fuhrer Blüchner in French class wrote "knickers" on the board instead of "naître". I know where that thought came from. It came from me.

Perhaps I should explain. Lets start with this: My name is Jacob John Smith, and this is the story of the crime of the century.

2. Words of Wisdom

The English language, I decided, was full of long, wise and wonderful words, that were rarely used, even by teachers. As a full-time native speaker of the language I felt it was my duty to use most of these words as often as possible, and all of them at least once in my life.

So after four schools in four years, the library and the dictionary were my best friends.

It isn't easy shifting schools. I had started school with a couple of mates from kindy, and was happily *ensconced* in primary school through the ages of five, six, and part of my third year, when, just after my birthday, my dad's company shifted him from Oamaru to Ashburton.

'He'll make friends easily,' they said; *they* being everyone from my mum and dad, to my new teachers, to my grandparents and assorted aunts and uncles. Only it wasn't easy. Kevin and Mike, my absolute best mates from Kings Road Primary in Oamaru, came to see me off when we left for Ashburton one Saturday morning in July. They waved, and I waved back, and thought about how much I was going to miss them, but I waited until they were well out of sight until I cried. And I kept crying the whole way to Ashburton despite my big sister April threatening to thump me and Mum eventually saying that if I didn't stop it I would miss out on McDonalds for lunch, and Dad saying that if I didn't shut up he was going to leave me on the side of the road.

Even Gumbo, the family dog, lay on the back seat in between April and me and put his front paws over his ears.

April thumped me. I missed out on McDonalds, (we had a dry, papery sandwich from a roadside café instead) but I didn't get left on the side of the road. Things might have been different if I had.

They gave me a school-buddy at Allenton Primary in Ashburton. That's a kid who is assigned by the teacher to show you around. I think the idea is to help you to get to know people and make friends.

The only problem was, my school-buddy was a creep named Alex Kerkoff, and you could have found a worse school-buddy, but it would have taken a lot of trying. I don't know why he was assigned to me. Maybe it was a punishment, or maybe it was just his turn.

The first lunchtime, Alex showed me where the toilets, library, and sick-room were, then disappeared to play some stupid trading card game with his friends. I sat around on a hard wooden bench for a while, looking at the light, dreary, wintery drizzle that just lay down out of the sky over everything, and after a while I found my way to the library.

At the end of lunch-break Alex was waiting for me outside the classroom door, and we walked in as though we had spent the whole lunchtime together. As if we were buddies. Only we weren't.

I did make friends though, eventually, Sam and Niwa. Andy too, I suppose, and Christian Jobson, although he was in another class. Not quite close friends, like Kevin and Mike had been, but good mates all the same.

So you can't imagine how devastated I was when my mum and dad announced to me, not much more than a year after we'd arrived in Ashburton, that he'd been promoted and we were moving to the capital city of Wellington.

My name is Jacob John Smith, and that's an unfortunate name in some ways. The John was my father's name, that's why I got it for my middle name, and the Jacob was just a name that my parents liked. But there's a kids' song called John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith, and my name was just a little too close to that for comfort.

In my third primary school they used to walk past the library singing it, but changing the lyrics to something much ruder.

John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith, his name is your name too

And you're such a smarty pants

You're a real farty pants

Go home John Jacob Jingleheimer Smith.

I said it was rude. I never said it was clever.

The library, which had been my retreat from boredom, became my refuge from their taunts, from their *derision*. It became my castle.

I don't think I made any friends in Wellington, but I was only there for eighteen months. Dad worked for a nationwide network of radio stations, but they got bought out by some overseas company and half the staff – including Dad – lost their jobs. So we shifted again, this time to Auckland. I'm sure I would have made some friends if I had stayed in Wellington a bit longer. I'm quite sure of that. Quite sure.

We shifted over Christmas and I think that helped, because when I started at Glenfield Intermediate, on the North Shore of Auckland, I wasn't the only stranger. There were lots of different kids there from lots of different primary schools, and because I started at the beginning of the year I didn't have to break into a class mid-year, and that was much easier.

I made friends almost immediately with a red-haired, firecracker of a boy named Tommy Semper. We got along great. We had the same sense of humour, liked (or didn't like) the same sports, and generally had a good time whenever we were around each other.

Only thing was, he didn't return to school after the first term holidays. This time it wasn't me that was transferred away, it was him. Tommy's father was a representative of a big Italian firm, and he got recalled to Italy. The whole family packed up and moved back there in the space of a week and a half, and the first we knew was when Mrs Abernethy, our teacher, called out the roll at the start of class on the first day back. I wanted to skip class that day, I felt sick. But I wasn't really sick and no amount of pleading would convince Mrs Abernethy otherwise. It occurred to me, possibly for the first time, how my life was completely out of my control. People told me what to do. Things happened to me. I had no say in anything. I was just a leaf swept up in a storm.

Andrew Allen transferred into our class during that term, his family had moved up from New Plymouth. For the first couple of weeks he looked as lost and lonely as I was. I didn't try to make friends with him though. Friends moved away. They hurt you, and it wasn't even their fault. Two long years at Intermediate School and I managed to get through them without making a single friend.

The only thing you could rely on, the one thing that was always there, was a library. And the library was full of books, and the books were full of words. Long, wise and wonderful words.

