

Time Travel in the Fourth Grade

by Jenny Hogan

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I'M IN THE fourth grade and I have four rules that I live my life by. Number one: all vegetables taste better with ketchup. Two: if your mom asks you what you did in school that day, say *anything* other than "not much." Three: stay away from girls. (They're trouble. Especially Kathy Hanson.) And four: never, *ever* have anything to do with time travel. . . .

At the time, it was only a theory I'd been working on, but the possibilities were endless. With time travel, I could cause my granddad not to spill that milk shake on Nana at the malt shop, or Dad not to spill that latte on Mom in the coffee shop. That would prevent them from meeting and cause me not to be born. Or there's the bigger effect: messing up the evolution of life on Earth as we know it. I might return from my trip to find I have six toes on each foot. Plus, I get a little carsick going over fifty miles per hour—I could never travel faster than the speed of light.



DO YOU HAVE A
THEORY,
AN IDEA THAT
EXPLAINS FACTS,
ABOUT WHY SPIDER
HAS KITTENS?



IT MUST
BE PART OF
EVOLUTION,
GROWTH THAT
HAPPENS OVER
TIME...



THE FELINE
FUNGI
NEED A FUZZY,
GRUMPY,
HOST
TO GROW.

Anyway, I absolutely avoided time travel at all costs. That is, I did until a few days ago.

You see, I had a small problem: the fourth-grade science fair. I had spent weeks perfecting my erupting volcano, made from plaster of Paris, yogurt, spackle, and Alka-Seltzer, with floating graham-cracker tectonic plates on a molasses lava flow. But the night before the science fair, when I was testing the lava flow and the volcanic missiles (raisins), my family curse kicked in: I knocked the whole thing off the desk, and it shattered! It had taken me *weeks* to make. How could I possibly redo it in time for the fair in the morning?

I sat there in despair . . . and then I saw it. My window lit up and got sort of wavy with the world outside spinning in a rainbow of colors. According to my theory, these were perfect conditions for time travel. I wasn't going anywhere near it. Then, scribbled words appeared on the





misty windowpane. Words in my own handwriting: *Hurry up!* When you get an invitation from yourself, you pretty much have to answer it, even if it's to travel through time. I opened the window and was sucked out into the vortex.

I landed on my rear end back in my room, but it looked totally different . . . and a teenage version of me stood there, panicking.

"I've been through a dozen parallel universes looking for you," he said. "You have to rebuild your volcano tonight! You *have* to win that science fair. Your future depends on it. My future. *Our* future."

Sigh. My head was already beginning to hurt.

"Why, exactly?" I asked my older self.

"The Tesla Science Scholarship," he gulped.

"They don't give that out until high school," I said. "I'm in the fourth grade."

HELP!
I'M TRAPPED IN A
VORTEX,
A SWIRLING
CIRCLE OF
MUSH-KITTY-ROOMS!



"It's the Butterfly Effect," he explained breathlessly. "One flap of a butterfly's wings affects the weather on the other side of the world. Everything is connected. . . . And if you don't win that science fair, then you'll—I'll—never go on to win the scholarship! Now, let's get that volcano rebuilt. It's got to be better than the first one. That never would have won."

"How do you know?"

"Trust me."

My teenage self got out a chemistry set and put it in front of me. Then he crossed his arms and waited.

"Aren't you going to help me?" I asked in disbelief.

"That would be cheating," he said. "You have to make it yourself."

"But you're *me*. I'm *you*, remember?"

"Cross-dimensional cheating, but cheating nonetheless."

I worked late into the night to rebuild the volcano. I ate a lot of graham crackers and raisins. When





I finally finished, the volcano was better than my original: it was perfect.

I lay back, exhausted. "So what do I do after I win the scholarship?"

He opened the window. "You get over your fourth rule. You'll see. Who do you think makes time travel possible, anyway?"

"Do you—I—still hate girls?" I asked.

"Nah—you grow out of that. Some of them are pretty nice."

"What about ketchup?"

"Are you crazy? We never give up ketchup!"

And with that, he sent me back out into the vortex with my new volcano model, pushing me back into the past.

He must have pushed too far, because before I knew it, I was stumbling into the cave of a surprised Neanderthal family. (You see what I mean about time travel?) But before I had a chance to accidentally stomp out some ancestor of the tomato

MIRO,
YOU'RE A MUSHROOM.
CAN YOU HELP?



OUI,
ZEEY ARE MY
ANCESTOR,
AN EARLY
RELATIVE,
BUT VAT CAN
I DO?
I COOK, THEY MEOW.

REMEMBER, KIDS,
NOT ALL
MUSHROOMS
ARE ALIKE.





family, causing ketchup never to be invented, I was pulled back into the vortex.

“Sorry!” came my teenage voice from far away.

Then I was plopped back into my room and found my fourth-grade world intact, including my No Girls Allowed sign. It was good to be home again.

My volcano won the science fair. No surprise, huh? But how did I go on to invent time travel by high school? And what was that thing about butterfly wings? That night, my window lit up again. Before I could even decide not to open it, it slid up, and my teenage head popped in.

“What do you want?” I asked suspiciously.

“Just checking up on things. I wanted to test a new theory or two. And I forgot to tell you—be nicer to Kathy Hanson. Our future depends on it!” ✨