
THE GOD OF MY BROTHER



CHAPTER ONE

I spin faster and faster on the swivel stool and begin making alarm noises. I like alarms and I like security.

‘Come on Max, stop mucking around. Calm down and take your tablet.’

Mum points to the pill lying on the kitchen bench beside a frosty glass of milk.

‘I don’t feel well mum; I’m going to stay home today.’

‘You’re fine Max.’

I stop spinning and rest my elbows on the bench. ‘Mum, I’m sick.’ I know my voice is loud because mum’s face is getting red, but I don’t care.

‘I’m starving,’ Corey skips through the archway into the kitchen. His blue school shirt hangs over his shorts and his thick, sandy hair is spiky, like he hasn’t brushed it. I always brush my hair. Straight across and smooth. I don’t like spikes.

Corey is eight and quite clever for his age. Not nearly as clever as me though. I am eleven and have an IQ of 161. That's okay. I still love him.

Mum smiles at Corey and it is a nice smile. She smiles at me too. But not as often, and I don't think it is as nice. I wonder whether I could invent something that measured that. Then I'd know for sure.

'What do you want for breakfast?' she says to Corey.

'What are you having Max?'

'I don't know. I feel sick.'

Corey's face gets a worried look. 'Where Max? Is it your head again?'

'Yes Corey, I have a headache, but my stomach is particularly bad this morning.'

Corey climbs onto the stool next to me.

'Do you want me to give you a head massage.'

'No, Corey. I will be alright.'

I don't like anybody to touch me. Once, my teacher made me stand still while she rubbed sunblock into my arms. I was very angry because it felt awful, and I screamed. They had to call mum to come and get me.

'Try massaging your temples,' says Mum.

I do and it works a little.

'Do you feel better now?' says Corey after I stop rubbing.

'Yes Corey, thank you. My headache has improved, but my stomach still hurts.'

Mum is watching us.

‘Okay honey, you don’t have to go to school.’

‘Thanks Mum, I really am sick.’

‘I know honey.’ She gives a sigh, and her face is sad, but everything is okay now because I don’t have to go to school.

Corey smiles at mum and says, ‘Thanks,’ when she says that she has made porridge for him. I don’t know why he smiles or thanks her because he doesn’t like porridge.

‘And some milk?’ she says as she places a glass in front of him.

‘No mum. We have a carton of milk when we get to school – remember?’

Corey’s class is participating in the Gold Coast University program. It has been measuring his class’s performance before and after they receive fruit and milk at the start of the day. They say preliminary results are very promising. I know this because the local Gold Coast News’ reported the story. It has gone national too. I saw Corey’s face, for about 1.2 seconds on the screen behind the reporter. He was sticking out his tongue. It was funny.

Mum says to Corey. ‘Hurry now and finish your breakfast, clean your teeth and don’t forget your hair, it looks like rats have been chewing it. Are you taking your bike this morning?’

‘Uh huh,’ Corey says through gluggy porridge. I hate porridge. It feels awful in my mouth.

She smiles and leans over to wipe a drip of something from his chin. 'Good boy. Don't forget to pack your lunch and make sure you give me a kiss before you go. I'll be in the laundry.'

'Can I have my breakfast in my room?' I have my bowl of cornflakes in my hands as I climb off the stool.

'No Max,' she says.

'Why not?'

'You might spill it.'

'I won't.'

'Max, last time you took a bowl of cereal up, it went all over the carpet.'

'But that is a statistical anomaly. I have eaten in my room 67 times now, and that only happened once.'

Mum gives another one of those sighs, which means she is wrong. 'All right Max. But please be careful.'

'I'll see you when you get home little guy,' I say to Corey. I don't hug him.

'Yeah Max, bye.' He doesn't hug me either. He knows.

CHAPTER TWO

String theory has interested me ever since I was 7 years, 3 months and 8 days old. I first heard about it when I was watching a science program on TV. When it finished, I asked mum about fermions and closed and opened string loops. Mum's eyes looked glassy and she told me that I'd have to check it out on the net. She says that for most things I ask about now. Dad is the same.

I logged on the next morning. I was supposed to be going to school, but I was sick. Well, that time, I wasn't sick and mum was right when she said I wasn't. But the kids had thrown me in the wheelie bin the day before and I didn't like it because it stunk, and I grazed my arm on its lip. I got stains on the front of my shirt because there was sauce in the bin, and I didn't like that either.

String theory didn't make much sense that day and even though I have been studying it for nearly four years now, it still isn't clear. There are many physicists

who believe that it does explain nature at the smallest distance scales, and I think they are right, but I'll need to do a lot more study.

This is partly the reason I want to say home today. I do have a stomach-ache and my head is a bit sore. But I hate school. It is boring and the maths they do is baby stuff. We are halfway through the chapter on algebra. Sometimes the teacher has to look things up and I could tell her the answers, but I don't, because she doesn't like me either and she always tells me to be quiet and sit still. Besides, I am studying the wave function now and I need more time.

It is 9.13am when, $\int_{-\infty}^{\infty} dx |\psi(x, t)|^2 = 1$ becomes irrelevant. Something has happened. I don't know how I know that, I just do. I can feel myself moving, pushing back from my chair and I don't know how that is happening either. It's like I'm a zombie. I walk through the house and onto the back verandah. Barefoot, I unlock the front gate and cross the road. We live on a highway and car horns are beeping at me as I cross it. I walk through glass from a shattered bottle and both my feet begin to bleed. I see the red smudges as I look back at the pale grey pavement. Then I look forward, down the hill. Around the corner is the school and already I know that this is where my feet are taking me.

Walking at a pace that is almost running, I reach the school fence and my feet stop.

I feel like I am not breathing anymore as I open the rusted wire gate. My feet begin moving again, carrying me across the oval. The brown strands of water-starved grass crackle under my feet. It sounds like thunder.

I take a sip of air and hold it as I see the shelter shed. Kids are lying under the rusted green roof. They look like rag dolls. Half-emptied cartons of milk dot the ground and turn the concrete muddy white. In the middle is Corey.

I know that I must have run for no more than thirty seconds, but it feels like it takes years to brush past two teachers at attention near the slatted bench. Their mouths are opened. Corey's teacher is shaking her head and crying as she crawls around.

I fall down beside Corey, and I look into his eyes. They are open, but he is not here. I press my nose against the softness of his cheek and breathe in his smell. The smell of little brother skin.

Scooping Corey up, I hold him close; even though touching him makes me feel shaky. I want to tell Corey that he is my best friend and that he should come back now. But he is gone.

CHAPTER THREE

Mum and dad are fighting again. I can hear them through my bedroom door. I put my head under my big woollen blanket and move my cheek away from the wet on my pillow. I can't stop my eyes from crying. I have researched this because I want to stop. I don't mind so much at night, when my head is under the blanket, but during the day it is not good to cry. People try to touch you.

Crying is supposed to eliminate the adrenocorticotrophic hormone, which releases stress. But I don't feel stressed, so this can't be right. There is a theory that crying is a result of perceived helplessness. I have thought about this a lot and I think that this might be valid.

The yells are getting louder. I can easily hear them now, but even if I couldn't, I know what they are saying. They say it all the time.

Mum tells dad that they wouldn't have been here if he had taken the transfer last year.

Dad says that Mum shouldn't have let Corey be in *that* study.

Mum says she couldn't have known that would happen. But when I hear her say this, I know she thinks it *is* her fault. It is not her fault, and it is not Dad's fault. It is history's fault and human nature. I have done a lot of research on this since ...

People can't change because they don't learn to change.

The words mum and dad yell each time are different, but not by much. And it always ends with the sound of the door slamming and the rev of the car as dad leaves.