

The Watch-thing by Andy Trigg

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Sam nearly didn't see it. He was late home and running as fast as he could through the park. If it wasn't for the late afternoon sun reflecting off something shiny in the bushes he'd never have noticed it. In fact even then he ran straight past it.

But after quickly imagining a few exciting things it could be he forgot why he was in such a hurry and ran back to investigate.

At first he couldn't see anything of interest because a cloud had hidden the sun and he could no longer see anything glinting.

After tossing aside various bits of rubbish though he eventually found a shiny metal object that looked like a watch.

The strange thing was that although it was big and chunky it was extremely light. In fact it hardly weighed anything

at all. And although it looked like metal it felt more like soft leather.

It had a gleaming but well- worn bracelet which felt warm to the touch, and where it should tell the time - if it was a watch that is - it just had a plain silver face with no hands or numbers on it.

Sam couldn't see any buttons either. In fact there was no sign of it working at all but he felt it was a good find all the same.

When he arrived home he told his mum that he'd been on a mission to save someone's life, and that the mission had been a great success.

Sam often imagined saving lives. He liked to dream about being a hero.

Mum wasn't sympathetic to this habit though, so he ended up being sent to his bedroom as soon as he'd eaten his tea.

He lay down on his bed looking at the watch-thing. It must have been thrown away by its previous owner when it stopped working he thought. He didn't think it was wrong to keep it for himself, it wasn't as if it was new or

anything.

However, to be on the safe side he decided that for now, he would keep it secret from his mum and dad - at least until he'd played with it and shown his mates. First though, he'd use his penknife and have a look inside as maybe it just needed a new battery.

He poked and prodded in an attempt to open it up but couldn't find any seams or joins to prize open. This passed on a few minutes and resulted in a couple of cuts to his fingers. He was so involved with his task that he didn't feel a thing. A large spot of blood smudged on his clean white pillow and made an unusual but interesting shape. This too went completely unnoticed.

Eventually he decided it wasn't meant to come apart and therefore didn't have a battery. In fact it must be solar powered. Anyway, it was definitely bust so he might as well pretend it was something useful, like a teleporter, or a zapper, or...

“That's it!” he exclaimed out loud.

“It's an alien's zapper.”

“What was that?” asked his mum, who was just passing his door at the time.

“Nothing mum,” said Sam.

When he tried it on his wrist for the first time it just hung there all loose and floppy. After a quick adjustment he managed a nice snug fit. The satisfaction of this achievement was slightly spoiled when at the same time he noticed the big red patch on his pillow.

Having traced its source, he began to notice a gentle throbbing pain. This soon changed to a not so gentle throbbing pain. And if it wasn't for what happened next he may have said one of those words that should never be said when an adult is within earshot.

This was fortunate for Sam as his mum was just passing his door at the time on her way back down stairs.

As the back of the watch-thing had made a good firm contact with Sam's skin, it had started to make a gentle humming sound. Then, the silver face with no hands or numbers on it, started to spin.

This had startled Sam, and his first instinct was to get it off his wrist.

But instead, he found himself just

staring in amazement. He watched the silver face as it appeared to melt away revealing a display of flashing red zeros.

After pulsating on and off, each zero, starting from the left, changed into a number until the final display was **67** 19,094,400.

He stared at the numbers, and wondered what they could mean.

It certainly wasn't the time he thought. Maybe it was the time on another planet, and this was an alien's watch.

“Woah!” Sam shouted.

Then he noticed the numbers were counting down backwards. He watched them for a while and realised it was counting down in real seconds.

Now at this time, Nicky Marsden, who was Sam's best friend, had been throwing small stones up at Sam's bedroom window for ages. He'd called at the front door but had been told Sam couldn't play out tonight.

By now he was quite angry at Sam's lack of response, especially as he could clearly see he was up there.

In fact if their other mate, Danny, hadn't caused him to get detention in Mr. Oliver's class earlier at school he'd have gone straight round to his house instead.

Eventually the combination of being ignored by Sam and thinking about his detention got Nicky so mad that he picked up a much larger stone than was really necessary for the job in hand.

It was amazing that the glass hadn't shattered on impact. The resulting noise however engaged the attention of everyone in the house and required a strategic withdrawal to the bushes.

From his window Sam saw the back garden illuminated by light spilling out through the open back door.

He watched his dad do a half-hearted search and go back inside. Observing Nicky crouching in the bushes he opened his window, and in a sort of half shout, half whisper said,

“What are you doing?”

“What are *you* doing?” Nicky replied angrily. “You totally ignored me. Anyway why can't you play out?”

“Look,” said Sam, “I've got something to show you - a secret

thing.” Nicky took on a sarcastic tone, “Yeah great, a new watch.”
“It’s not a watch, it’s ...”

Sam’s dad clipped him from behind.

“Who are you talking too? Tell them to go home now. Shut that window and get ready for bed”, he scowled.

He then glanced outside again, closed the curtains and headed back downstairs to his beer. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he slipped on the last step and said the word that Sam was thinking of earlier.

Sam fell asleep about ten o’clock and the batteries in his torch ran out at about half past. He’d spent ages under the covers watching the display counting down.

In the morning, he couldn’t eat all of his breakfast. This wasn’t due to excitement, which would be perfectly understandable under the circumstances. It was due to his mum feeling guilty about Sam missing his supper.

Trying to make it up to him, she had supplied him with a breakfast that, “Even dad couldn’t finish.”

At half past eight he rushed out to meet his mates leaving his lunch box on the kitchen side.

He waited impatiently at the end of his road with his new possession strapped proudly to his wrist, sleeves rolled up.

Nick and Danny didn't greet Sam as they passed by. They were too busy arguing about whose fault it was that Nicky had been given detention the day before.

"I didn't know he was behind me did I?" claimed Danny. This was true but Nicky was unimpressed.

"I won't show you anything any more, big gob."

"Just watch it," said Danny, who was now losing patience. Being much bigger than Nicky, he was confident that if things got out of hand, he could easily settle the argument physically.

Sam butted in to get their attention and showed off the watch-thing.

"I found it in the bushes. In the park, look its brilliant."

"What is it?" asked Danny who was grateful for the change of subject.

"It counts down... something. I don't know what yet - but it only works,

when in contact with human skin.”

He proudly demonstrated this fact by removing it from his wrist and holding it in up front of them.

“The display shuts down as soon as...” Nicky snatched it for a closer look. “Let’s see then”, he said.

Instinctively Sam kicked him on the shin and retrieved his possession.

“You’ll bust it, idiot.”

Nicky didn’t kick back. He wanted to, but like most people Sam was also bigger than him.

“Missed me anyway.” he said unconvincingly.

Danny interrupted saying,

“Come on then, let’s have a proper look.”

Sam held it in the air so that both could see its blank display but not actually reach it.

“Now look what happens when it comes into contact with human skin,” he said dramatically as he placed it back on his wrist.

“It spins and hums,” he announced as he briefly pressed it, first to Danny’s ear, then Nicky’s.

Then both his friends, just like Sam the night before, were amazed by the

magical appearance of the flashing zeros which formed the numbers **67** 19,005,011 and counting down.

“What is it?” asked Danny again.

“I don’t know, but it’s counting backwards to something.” Sam replied.

As they reached the main road, across from the school gates, Sam was watching the display when it suddenly started to make a strange beeping noise. He watched astonished, as the numbers began whizzing down so fast they became a blur.

Within seconds they had stopped at **00 0008**.

As he stepped off the curb into the road he didn’t see or hear the car travelling towards him. The beeping had now changed to a long continuous tone and Sam was transfixed by the numbers counting down 5... 4... 3... 2...

The car made a deafening screeching noise as the driver braked hard.

“Watch out stupid!” Danny shouted as he grabbed Sam’s arm and yanked him back as hard as he could. Sam and Danny fell to the ground and the air filled with the smell of burning rubber.

By the time the driver had pulled herself together, all three boys had managed to scramble across the road out of sight.

A little dazed, but otherwise unhurt, they entered the school and mingled with the crowd. Sam checked the watch-thing's display again.

He didn't take in the whole of the numbers but the first number, the one that was darker than rest, had changed back to **67**. He was now more puzzled than ever.

Then the noise from the crowd faded and the hairs on the back of his neck seemed to stand apart from each other.

His skin went cold and his legs felt weak as delayed shock set in.

He managed to find his way to his classroom and felt a little better after sitting down.

The rest of the day was fairly normal and uneventful. Sam found it pretty difficult to concentrate though.

Fortunately he was saved from trouble on a few occasions by Nicky

who had brought him back from his distant thoughts with a well timed nudge or kick.

At lunch time Sam decided he needed some help to find out what the watch-thing was and what it was doing. He knew most adults would take it off him but he had to trust someone.

The last lesson was with his science and technology teacher, Mr. Oliver. Although he was a little eccentric he was basically OK. A bit soft really. He would have to be the one.

Sam sat unusually quietly throughout the lesson and Mr. Oliver mistook his silence for interest. He was disappointed later when, after asking Sam a few questions, he realised that he hadn't heard a word all lesson.

When the final bell rang, the rest of the class noisily scrambled for freedom. Sam remained in his seat, ready to reveal his discovery.

“Where did you get this from?” Mr. Oliver asked as he carefully inspected it.

“I've never seen anything quite like it before”, he added, “and it's so light.”

Sam began to explain, but when he got to the point about human skin activating the display, Mr. Oliver felt things were getting a bit far-fetched and butted in.

“Now then Sam, I know you’re not the most well behaved lad in my class but you’re usually quite...”

He paused for a moment and inquired, “You didn’t have anything to do with that silly drawing yesterday did you?”

“No Sir.”

“Good, only...” He paused again having now forgotten what he was going to say in the first place and Sam jumped in.

“Put it on Sir and see for yourself.”

“Oh yes,” he said, “so it only works on your wrist does it?”

He found the strap adjusted easily, and once fastened to his wrist the humming and spinning took him by surprise too.

“Look Sir. It’s just like I said.”

“Very impressive Sam, very impressive.”

Mr. Oliver watched the display but it settled on some totally different

numbers to those Sam was expecting. “What does **11** 17,021 mean? asked Mr. Oliver.

Sam looked carefully at the numbers, especially the first one which was always darker than the rest.

“I don’t get it. When it was on my wrist this number is **67**.”

“It’s faulty lad. Faulty.” He tapped the face with his index finger and shook it close to his ear. The display remained unchanged.

“No.” Insisted Sam, “It’s counting down to something. Well I thought it was, but I’m not sure now.”

Mr. Oliver couldn’t think of a reply, so he just stared at the numbers.

Sam continued.

“This morning when I was almost killed. The display was...”

“Killed? Almost killed lad?”

“A car Sir - but Danny saved me. Everything changed to zeros except the last number, and it sounded an alarm.” Sam gestured for the watch-thing back.

He placed it back on his own wrist and the resulting display was **67**
18,984,552

“Look it’s back to **67** and counting down to something. Yesterday it was

67 and 19 million seconds and today it's 18 million."

"But if it's counting down to something," said Mr. Oliver, "why are they different numbers on me?"

The silence was eventually broken by the clattering of mop buckets and the opening of the classroom door.

"Oops," said a surprised cleaner.

"I didn't know anyone was in here. Don't mind me."

She gave Sam a disapproving look. He must have been up to no good to be kept in after School she thought.

Mr. Oliver rose from his chair,

"Come on then Sam, we'd better be off now. It's been very interesting and thank you for confiding in me. There's definitely something strange about this and I'll give it some thought."

The disappointment on the cleaners face went unnoticed as they both left the room.

Sam walked hesitantly on the freshly cleaned and wet corridor floor. He stepped over a mop handle, which although still in its bucket, had fallen over and was blocking his path.

“So it sounded an alarm this morning and the display turned to zeros did it Sam?”

“All except the last few numbers,” Sam confirmed as he waited for Mr. Oliver who was fiddling with the mop.

“It counted down 5... 4... 3 ...”

“And what happened when it reached zero?”

“I don’t think it did Sir, Danny pulled me back from the road and the next time I looked it was back to, er.. normal.”

“That’s better,” Mr. Oliver then said proudly as he balanced the mop in the bucket. It was at this point that Sam gave up on Mr. Oliver, and decided he’d be better off trying to solve the mystery alone.

As he went on his way, Mr. Oliver decided to remove their footprints with the mop. As he reached out for the mop handle the cleaning lady, who was watching through the classroom door, fixed him with a suspicious gaze and he quickly changed his mind.

“Goodnight.” he shouted as he turned and followed Sam out.

As Sam walked through the school gates he found himself in company, bad company. It was Gary Thompson and his two mates who'd heard that Sam had found something of value. Not that they had actually been at school today. They had been hanging around the back of the shopping centre as usual. Someone must have told them about the watch-thing.

"I've been waiting for you," Gary said menacingly.

"What for?" asked Sam.

He was mystified as to why they would be waiting for him. They were much older than him, and like everyone else, he kept out of their way. As all three thugs gathered round him, Sam noticed a powerful smell. He could tell they'd been sniffing glue or something.

"Let's have a look then," Gary insisted.

"What at?" was Sam's reply - he assumed they were after money. "I haven't got anything."

He found himself pinned to the wall by his shoulders. Gary grabbed his wrist and removed the watch-thing.

"What's this then?" he taunted as he

dangled it in Sam's face. The foul stench of Gary's breath made Sam feel ill and the crazed look in his eyes frightened him.

"Be careful with it," he begged as Gary clumsily let it slip from his hand and fall to the ground.

As Gary bent down to fumble for the watch-thing his legs gave way and he fell to his knees. He grabbed hold of Sam's leg to steady himself.

"Gi' us a fag." he mumbled as he looked up to his accomplices. His eyes strained to focus on either one of them but failed. He then proceeded to fiddle with the watch.

"Let me show you how it works." Sam pleaded. Gary remained on his knees.

"What's wrong wi' it?" he demanded to know as he held it inches from his eyes but saw nothing.

"It only works when it's on me" Sam lied. Gary didn't notice the freshly lit cigarette on offer from his mate. He put the watch-thing onto his wrist and as the display came to life he grinned. At this point Sam was released as the other two went to have a closer look. This was Sam's chance to escape but he

knew he would not see the watch-thing again if he did.

“Wow,” said the one with the lit cigarette as he offered it once more to Gary. After getting no response again he took a large drag and decided to keep it himself.

“What does it do then?” he asked as he blew the smoke in Sam’s face.

Sam was eager to see the display for himself and jostled for position. Gary struggled to his feet using his mates to haul himself up. Showing the watch-thing to Sam he demanded an explanation. Sam saw that the display was **00 009,937**.

“I don’t know what it means.” Sam said in an alarmed tone. He looked again at the numbers counting down.

“It hasn’t got long to go though.”

For some reason Sam’s reaction worried Gary and he reacted angrily.

“What’s not got long to go? What are you on about?”

“Shall I hit ’im Gaz?” requested the one with the cigarette. Sam took a couple of steps back.

“I don’t think it’s good to reach

zero,” he shouted.

Gary removed the watch and grabbed one of his mates.

“See what it says on you,” he demanded. As he passed it over,

Sam seized his opportunity and snatched it from his hand. He ran off as fast as he could leaving all three thugs, who were in no fit state to chase him, arguing amongst themselves.

As he got back onto the main road, Mr. Oliver, who had forgotten his coat and had been back to the classroom, was only just leaving in his car. As he pulled up alongside Sam, he wound down his window.

“I thought you’d be home by now,” he said, “get in and I’ll drop you off.” Sam climbed in and confided in Mr. Oliver again.

“I think Gary’s going to die Sir.”

“What? Gary who? What do you mean *die*?”

“He put the watch-thing on and there’s hardly any seconds left. I think it was less than 10,000 that’s all. And he’s been sniffing glue or something.”

“Who has?”

“Gary Thompson Sir. You see I think

the watch monitors your life-force. And when it gets to zero - that's it."

Mr. Oliver was sceptical.

"I think your imagination is getting the better of you again Sam don't you?"

"No Sir." Sam held out his arm showing the watch safely back on his wrist.

"Look," he said, "It's **67** on me. It was **11** on you and **00** on Gary Thompson, just **00** and about 9,900 seconds. I think it's showing years and seconds.

Mr. Oliver pondered for a moment on the implications before dismissing it.

Partially out of curiosity, he reached to the back seat for his case and removed a calculator. Turning it on he tapped in 9,900.

"OK then," he said, "there are 60 seconds in a minute, so 9,900 divided by 60 ... is ... 165 minutes. That's just under three hours.

There was another silence.

"If this is true," said Mr. Oliver eventually, "although I don't see how it could be.."

"Sir he's been sniffing glue, and his eyes were all weird. He could hardly even stand up."

Mr. Oliver knew that whether the watch-thing's powers were real or imagined, he had a responsibility to do something. Besides, he'd always had an open mind on the unexplained and supernatural.

“OK,” he said reluctantly as he put the car into gear and pulled out.

“The police,” he said. “We'll go to the police.”

“Will they believe us Sir?”

“Of course not,” replied Mr. Oliver stopping the car as quickly as he'd just set off. An angry motorist blasted his horn and shook his fist, yelling something unpleasant as he swerved to avoid them.

“I don't really believe it myself lad, so we can't expect them to can we?”

“But what about the sniffing? If we just told them he's been sniffing glue they might do something then, might they?”

“They might.”

Mr. Oliver set off once more, this time without incident.

As they arrived at the police station, Mr. Oliver instructed Sam to keep quiet.

“We’d better not mention the watch-thing,” he said as they entered the building.

“Can I help Sir?” asked a bored-looking policeman from behind the desk. Although speaking to Mr. Oliver, he was actually looking at Sam.

“What’s he been up to then?” he added.

“Who?” replied a puzzled Mr. Oliver.

“The boy.”

Sam butted in.

“I haven’t done anything.”

“Mmm.” said the policeman, as though he didn’t believe him. Mr. Oliver emitted a nervous laugh as he realised the mistake.

“Oh no, it’s not the lad - he’s with me. We’ve come about another of my pupils, who may be in danger.”

The policeman’s tone changed.

“Danger?” he replied. He seemed a little less bored now. “What kind of danger?”

Sam butted in again.

“He’s going to die very soon.”

Mr. Oliver panicked.

“Er.. he *could* die Sam. That is - we think he *could* die if nothing is done. There’s no actual *proof*, is there?”

He cleared his throat nervously and smiled at the policeman. He hadn’t intended to smile, it just happened on its own.

“Right,” said the policeman, as he reached for his pen and notepad, “a murder eh?”

Turning to a fresh page he looked them both up and down suspiciously.

With pen poised for action he enquired.

“What *exactly*, do you know?”

“Well,” said Mr. Oliver, “young Sam here, thinks that one of our pupils is in danger because he’s been sniffing something.”

The policeman, who'd expected something a little more exciting, was disappointed. He let the pen slip out of his fingers.

“And what makes you so sure he’s going to die?” he asked, resuming his bored tone. Sam jumped in again.

“It’s Gary Thompson, he could hardly stand up. It was like he was drunk and I could smell glue.”

“Well where does he live then this Thompson lad?” He retrieved his pen and poised it over the notepad again. When it became apparent that neither of them actually knew where he lived, the pen fell to the desk once more.

“Now we can’t do anything without proper information can we?” he moaned.

“Don’t move,” he ordered as he rose and went through to the back room.

A minute or so later, he returned. Placing a mug of tea carefully on the desk, he rubbed his hands together like you would when trying to keep warm on a cold day, and spoke.

“Gary Thompson eh? My lads say they’ve have had dealings with him before.”

Just then another, much younger policeman, appeared from the back room, cup in hand. This one seemed quite friendly to Sam as they exchanged smiles. He drank the last mouthful of his tea, before placing his empty mug on the desk.

“I know where he lives Sarge. I know where he hangs out too, I’ll find him.”

He took a couple of steps towards the door, but shuddered to a halt as the

sergeant yelled after him, “Cup constable! Cup!” The sergeant then stared intensely at the mug, as if trying to make it disappear using the power of thought alone.

“Sorry sarge,” said the embarrassed constable as he picked it up and took it through to the back. When he returned, he avoided eye contact and left without speaking. Sam and Mr. Oliver followed closely behind, thanking the sergeant as they left.

“We’ve done all we can now, Sam. Let’s get you home.”

“Don’t tell me,” said his mum sarcastically as he walked through the front door. “You’ve been on another life saving mission.”

“I have,” Sam insisted. “I *have* mum, honest.” As she raised her hand to clip him round the ear, she caught sight of Mr. Oliver coming up the front path. Her hand froze momentarily above her right ear before coming to rest on the back of her own head in a scratching motion as she attempted to disguise her intent.

“Oh hello Mr. Oliver,” she said innocently, as several of the things Sam might have done to warrant a teacher escorting him home from school sprang to mind. “What’s he done?”

Sam stomped up to his bedroom.

Mr. Oliver then explained how he and Sam had been trying to prevent a possible death. Keeping details to a minimum he said nothing about the watch-thing, and bid her goodbye.

Sam’s mum felt guilty again and shouted her apologies up to Sam, “.. and you forgot your lunch box again love.” Sam didn’t reply. Leaving him to come around, she went back to the kitchen and put a couple of extra sausages in the pan.

Upstairs, Sam lay on his bed staring at the watch-thing’s display. He was now starting to regret finding it.

Eventually, the aroma of freshly cooked sausage and chips proved too tempting.

After he’d eaten his tea, he asked if he could call for Nicky. As soon as he

got outside, he removed the watch-thing from his pocket.

Slipping it on his wrist, he breathed a sigh of relief as the display settled on **67**. He was now fearful of seeing that figure change. Gary's time was just about up by now he thought. It was about two and a half hours since he'd tried on the watch-thing so there wouldn't be much time left for him.

Nicky wasn't back from his karate lesson yet.

"He'll be back soon," said his mum. Sam wandered the streets for a while ending up by the old railway tracks at the side of the river. By this time, he had come to a decision. It might be a useful warning device but he didn't want to know how long he, or anyone else for that matter, had got left to live. Removing the watch-thing from his wrist, he decided to throw it down the bank into the river.

"I'll have that," said a voice, as its owner made a grab for it but missed. Sam spun around to come face to face with Gary Thompson.

"You're for it now." he promised.

Sam was shocked. He'd never

expected to see Gary again. He certainly hadn't heard him creeping up behind him. Hiding the watch-thing behind his back, he remarked innocently,

“You're alive.”

“Course I am,” came the reply, “but *you* might not be when I've finished with you.”

“I haven't done anything.” pleaded Sam.

“You were seen, in the cop shop. And we've just had a copper sniffing around, disturbing our plans for tonight.”

“Well whatever plan it was, you're better off now you haven't done it,” Sam bravely insisted.

“What do you know about it?”

“Nothing. Honest. I just think you were in danger that's all.”

“Oh yeah?”

Sam tried to explain.

“The watch,” he said as he brought it briefly back into view to emphasise his point before quickly putting it behind him again. “It said you only had a few hours left, so I went to get help.”

Gary couldn't make sense of what was being said. Sam spelled it out.

“The watch showed you were going

to die in about 3 hours, that's around this time now. If I hadn't gone to the police, then you'd have been doing that *thing*, right now, and it would have killed you. Don't you see?"

Gary didn't see. And when Gary didn't understand something, or when something worried him, then he usually became quite violent. Sam looked round and saw that they were very close to the edge of the bank.

He brought his hand from behind his back and pointed to the drop below. As he did so the watch-thing dangled temptingly and Gary made another lunge for it. Sam instinctively snatched it away, and Gary tumbled down the bank, rolling over and over before coming to a stop at the bottom.

As the dust settled, Sam could see that he had come to rest in the river with his head under the water.

Without hesitation he raced down the bank after him. The watch-thing fell out of his hand unnoticed as he scrambled to reach Gary's motionless body. Grabbing both his legs, he pulled him clear of the water and collapsed in a heap, fighting for breath.

Gary wasn't moving, so Sam slapped

his face causing him to cough and splutter.

“Wake up!” he shouted.

After a short while, a moan leaked from Gary’s lips, and a few moments later he’d recovered enough to resume his threats. Sam scrambled back up the bank. As he reached the top, he turned to see Gary on his feet. The words,

“I’ll get you for this,” caused a sinking feeling in Sam’s stomach and he set off back towards home. “Good riddance,” he said out loud when he realised the watch-thing was gone.

Nicky and Sam spent the rest of the evening trying to make sense of the whole business but failed. Sam was convinced he’d saved Gary’s life, that the watch-thing had shown he was going to die but he’d saved him by preventing his planned job – whatever it was.

Nicky made the point that the watch-thing might have actually been showing Gary would fall into the river but it was impossible to know the truth. Sam had been forced to think about things that a boy of his age wasn’t

ready to think about. It took a long time, but he eventually managed to put those thoughts to the back of his mind where they belonged and get back to fantasising about being a hero.

A few days later, by the old railway tracks, a young boy had been throwing stones into the river. As he scoured for bigger and better ones, he noticed something glinting in the earth about halfway up the bank. There he discovered the watch-thing.

Hearing his grandmother call his name, he stuffed it into his pocket. It was time to visit the hospital where his younger sister was seriously ill.

As his family sat around her bed, the boy, who was too young to realise the seriousness of the situation, fiddled with the watch-thing trying to get it to work. A doctor entered the room briefly to give bad news.

“If she makes it though the night, she’ll stand a chance of recovery,” he said, “I’m sorry, there’s nothing more

we can do now.”

The boy fidgeted on his chair and was told to stop. After a while he walked over to his sister’s bedside.

“When is she going to wake up?” he asked.

“She’s very poorly,” said gran.

“Look Sarah,” he said holding up the watch-thing in front of her. Undeterred by the lack of response he continued,

“Look what I’ve found.”

“Leave her alone,” snapped his mum.

“She wants to look at it,” he replied innocently. He gently lifted his sister’s arm and placed the watch-thing over her wrist.

“He’s not doing any harm,” his father reassured.

“Look gran,” he said, as the humming and spinning began.

“It’s working now,” he said excitedly.

“Very nice” she replied, “what time is it?”

The boy screwed his face in puzzlement as he tried to make out the display, “**81** 252,8...”

“It’s broken love,” gran interrupted, “I’ll buy you a new one.”

