

1 Luke's Lesson

Luke searched for a sign of weakness in his opponent, but Patrick left him no opening. As Patrick's eyes narrowed, Luke stepped back and quickly blocked Patrick's kick. But the force of the blow knocked Luke back. Patrick lunged at him, but Luke recovered in time to throw a punch

that Patrick easily avoided. In an instant, Patrick pulled Luke's leg out from under him and pinned him to the mat.

"Do you give up?" Patrick asked, grinning widely.

"Get off me," Luke said breathlessly.

"Okay, boys," the coach shouted. "That's enough. The lesson's over. See you next week."

Patrick helped Luke up, and they both headed off to change. The boys had taken karate since they were seven, but Patrick had always had a slight edge over Luke. And now Patrick was at least two inches taller and considerably stronger, so he usually won their weekly matches.

Once outside, the boys sat down on the sidewalk with their backs against the wall beside the gym.

"Beat you again," Patrick said. "Maybe when you've grown a little, eh?"

"Yeah, we'll see what happens next time. It's not about being bigger. Coach says it's just a matter of learning how to turn your opponent's strength against him."

Patrick simply smiled and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand. "Got any water left?" he asked.

"Sure," said Luke tossing him his bottle.

The sidewalk was crowded that afternoon with office workers trying to take advantage of the beautiful July day. Luke looked across the street and saw a dark-green car with blacked-out windows pull up. The passenger window opened, and a camera with a long lens pointed toward them. He was about to mention the camera to Patrick when a red minivan pulled up by the sidewalk in front of them.

"Mom's here," Patrick said, handing Luke the bottle back.

They both jumped up and sprinted for the front-seat passenger door.

"Hey, squirt. Move it!" Patrick said to his younger sister, Emma. "I sit in the front, not you."

"I'm not moving," she said. "I was here first." Emma was twelve and closer in age to Luke than

Patrick was, but her brother still treated her like a child.

"Baby seats are in the back," Patrick said sarcastically.

"Stop it, you two. Just get in!" snapped Kate, Patrick's mother, as she jerked her thumb in the direction of the back seat of the van. Patrick and Luke clambered into the back.

"Your mom and dad called, Luke," said Kate. "They're going to be late. I said you could stay with us for supper. Is pizza OK with you?"

"Sure, thanks," said Luke.

She smiled at him and put the van in gear.

As they pulled away from the curb, Luke turned around and noticed the dark-green car pull slowly into the traffic behind them.



A Present for Patrick

*“Good evening. I’m Nathaniel
Benson with the ten o’clock news.”*

“Come on, boys,” Patrick’s mother, Kate, called from the kitchen. “Time to call it a night.”

“Aw, come on, Mom,” moaned Patrick. “It’s not like there’s school tomorrow.”

“I realize summer vacation’s just started,” Kate replied, “but we have a big day tomorrow. There’s your birthday party, and we have to finish packing to go to Grandma’s on Sunday.”

“This is a really awesome present,” Luke said, looking at the watch Patrick had received for his birthday from his mother earlier that evening. It had a gold and silver band and looked very expensive. Luke was fascinated by the watch’s face, which had Roman numerals on it. The watch had belonged to Patrick’s dad, who died when Patrick was very young. It had six small dials around the edge depicting the time in Los Angeles, New York, London, Paris, Hong Kong and Tokyo. Luke turned it over in his hands, wondering if Patrick’s dad had ever visited those cities.

“OK, you two. Time to get moving, Luke,” Kate said. “I want to watch the rest of the news.”

*“... and in local news, industrialist
Rupert Lennox died early this
evening after a short illness. The*

founder and CEO of LennoxGen, Mr. Lennox was a pioneer in genetic research and test-tube-baby technology. We'll have more on this story after the break."

Kate pressed the mute button and turned to Luke. "Come on now, boys, before it gets too dark."

"Okay," said Luke, standing up and heading toward the front door. "Thanks for supper, Mrs. Erickson."

"You're welcome, Luke," Kate called back. "Oh, and Patrick, we're out of milk. Can you pick up a carton at the convenience store before they close?"

"No problem," Patrick said. "Hey, Luke, wait up." Patrick joined Luke on the front porch. "We'd better hurry," Patrick said, looking up at the rapidly darkening sky, then glancing at his new watch. "The store closes in five minutes."

"I'll race you there," said Luke. "Go!"

"Hey!" yelled Patrick, as Luke sprinted ahead.

Patrick gained on Luke as the two of them ran down the street, but Luke still reached the store first.

"Okay," Patrick gasped, after coming to a halt. "You win this time, but I'll beat you the next."

"You're just a sore loser," Luke said, grinning.

"See you at my party tomorrow," Patrick said, looking at his watch again.

"You bet," said Luke, waving to Patrick, who disappeared inside the convenience store.

As Luke hurried down the street, a dark-green car pulled up and parked across from the convenience store.

3 The Vanishing

Luke had overslept and was late for Patrick's party. He sprinted the last few blocks, turned the final corner and saw several police cars in front of Patrick's house.

A smartly dressed woman answered the door.
"Are you Luke Carpenter?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I'm Inspector Roberta Tremaine. Would you step into the kitchen, please?"

"What's happened?" Luke asked, glancing into the sitting-room.

A uniformed policewoman comforted Kate, who had her arm around Emma.

"We should leave Mrs. Erickson and Emma alone," whispered the inspector, stepping into the kitchen.

She gestured to Luke to sit down opposite her at the kitchen table. She was a middle-aged woman with a long thin face, high cheekbones and green eyes that reminded Luke of a cat. Her ash-blond hair was cut short, accentuating her slender neck.

"Patrick has run away from home. Do you have any idea where he might be, Luke?"

"What!"

"His mother said you were one of the last people to see him at the convenience store."

"I saw him go inside, but then I left."

"The store owner said Patrick bought some milk, but he never made it home."

"Are you sure he ran away?" Luke asked. "That's just not like him."

"That's why I wanted to talk to you. Can you think of anything Patrick said or did recently that might indicate he was planning something like this?"

"No, not at all. He was happy. It's his birthday today, and summer vacation is just starting. He was going to the coast tomorrow to stay with his grandparents. Have you checked with them?"

"Yes, we've talked to them, but they haven't seen or heard from him. We're doing everything we can to locate him, but we found this on the river bank."

She reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out a small plastic bag.

"His dad's watch!" Luke gasped.

"Was Patrick depressed about anything?"

"No, and he would never kill himself, if that's what you're asking."

"That's just one of the possibilities, but you need to be prepared to accept the worst."

Luke was stunned as the inspector handed him her business card.

"If you think of anything that might help our investigation, Luke, please give me a call."

As they left the kitchen, they saw Kate and Emma in the hallway.

"Thank you, Mrs. Erickson," said Inspector Tremaine, shaking Kate's hand. "I'll send someone over to check on you tomorrow. In the meantime, if you hear anything from Patrick, please call me immediately."

Kate nodded and gently pulled a sobbing Emma closer to her.

There was still no sign of Patrick three months later. It was mid-September, and school had resumed, as had Luke's after-school karate class. It had finished earlier than usual, so Luke stood outside the gym and waited for his father.

Grey clouds gathered overhead, and when the first few drops of rain fell, Luke took shelter under

the canopy of a nearby office tower. A throng of men and women hurried out of the entrance and pushed past Luke on their way home from work. But one lone figure remained on the steps.

"Patrick?" asked Luke, stunned. But his friend didn't answer him. Luke reached over and grabbed his arm. "Patrick, where have you been?"

"Luke?" Patrick asked, offering a weak smile.

"Patrick, what happened to you?"

"Luke?" Patrick repeated, frowning at him. Then suddenly his expression changed. "Who are you?" he demanded angrily.

There was a look of fear in Patrick's eyes as he backed away from Luke toward the main entrance. "Get away from me!" he yelled.

The office tower doors suddenly swung open, and a large man with a shaved head hurried toward them. Right behind him was a tall thin man in a dark suit.

"Get the car, Merrick!" snapped Patrick. "And get this child out of my sight, Harriman!"

"At once, sir," said the tall thin man.

He gave a quick nod to his partner, then pulled a small radio from his jacket pocket, which was embroidered with the word LennoxGen. The taller man spoke into the radio as the bald man grabbed Luke tightly by the arm.

"Hey!" Luke shouted. "Let me go!"

"Shut up!" the bald man said, roughly pulling Luke into the rain. "You say anything about this to anyone and you're dead. Understand?"

The bald man didn't relax his grip until he had dragged Luke back to the entrance of the gym. By that time, a limousine with blacked-out windows had pulled up sharply at the curb. The bald man shoved Luke inside the gym and hurriedly joined the tall man and Patrick as they got into the limousine. Then it pulled away and disappeared into the rush hour traffic. Moments later, Luke's dad arrived.

"Sorry you had to wait in the rain, son, but the traffic was terrible."

Still stunned, Luke got into the car.

"That's OK, Dad," he said.

He considered mentioning the incident, but the memory of the bald man's words stopped him.

As soon as Luke got inside the house, he ran up to his room, turned on his computer and typed LennoxGen into the search engine.

LennoxGen had been founded twenty years earlier by billionaire industrialist Rupert Lennox. Luke clicked on a link and found a picture of Lennox taken when the government began hearings on stem cell research. LennoxGen had been a pioneer in infertility treatment but was now focused on genetic research.

Ten minutes later Luke stood on the Ericksons' front porch. He swallowed hard and pressed the doorbell. Emma opened the door.

"Hi, Luke. Mom's just at the store, but you can wait if you want. She won't be long."

"Thanks," Luke said, following Emma into the living room.

She curled up in an armchair and turned the TV on while Luke sat opposite her on the sofa.

"Actually," Luke said, "I came to see you."

"Really?"

"Yes," said Luke, turning the TV off. "I know this may sound weird, but I think I saw Patrick a few hours ago."

"What! Where?"

"Downtown."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure. He seemed to recognize me at first, but he suddenly got angry and started yelling at me. Then a guy from LennoxGen pulled me away and threatened to kill me if I told anyone anything about what had happened."

"What's LennoxGen?"

"A drug company."

Just then, the front door opened.

"Emma?" her mother called out from the hallway.

"Don't tell your mother or anyone else anything about this," Luke whispered urgently. "Meet me at the tennis courts in an hour."

"Oh, hi, Luke," Kate said, entering the living room. "What brings you here?"

"Just checking in, Mrs. Erickson."

“It’s very nice of you to stop by, Luke. Would you like to stay for dinner?”

“Sorry, but I have to run. I told Mom I’d be right home. But thanks for the invitation.”

“Okay. Stop in anytime, Luke. It’s always a pleasure to see you.”

“Goodbye, Mrs. Erickson. Goodbye, Emma.”

“See you later, Luke,” Emma said, with a quick nod.

An hour later, Luke met Emma at the tennis courts near the community centre.

“I never really bought the idea that Patrick ran away or committed suicide,” said Emma.

“Me neither. It never added up, despite what the police told us.”

“I checked out LennoxGen on the Web too. If we want answers, we have to go there.”

“But what if they recognize me?”

“You saw Patrick at their downtown office. We’ll go to their research facility just outside of town.”

“They won’t let kids into a place like that. We’ll never get access.”

“We’ll tell them we’re reporters for the school newspaper. We’ve got a couple of professional days off school, so we can try tomorrow.”

“OK, but will LennoxGen go for it?”

“They already have,” said Emma, with a smile. “We have an appointment at nine-thirty.”