

Hope in the Dark Horizons

MICHAEL E. TESSIER



Time travelers should never alter the past. When Sara's desires got the best of her, the time explorer's small act set in motion a chain of unwanted events. After a time experiment goes awry, clues left in the past become Sara's only salvation. A race to decode the clues ensues with a revenge minded biker gang giving her chase. Ultimately, Sara's deliverance may rest with those events she once set in motion.

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First Edition

Dedication

To Cindy, the book hound

Chapter 1

1995, Atlantic City

Sara Kline lay naked upon the sheets of the hotel bed, her body gently throbbing with feminine delight. She was basking in the warm afterglow of sex. A steady hum permeated the room and a cool, mellow breeze emanated from the central air conditioner. The light, chilled air was a welcome relief to the high humidity of the ocean seaside resort. Sara just lay awake, enjoying the bodily pleasure. She reflected on how much her life had changed over the past year. Jon, her husband, lay next to her. A sheet, partially wrapped around his nude body, gave him a bit of warmth from the coolness of the air-conditioned air. Jon was fast asleep. He was bone tired exhausted from the hours of his manly work. Sara thought upon her studies at the University of Chicago. How long ago that part of her life seemed. Her mind drifted back into remembrance. Sara recollected how much her life had changed from her expectations.

Sara, at twenty-three years of age, was in the prime of her youth. She stood five foot, six inches tall with a petite frame and a medium complexion. Sara wore her wavy dark brown hair to just above her shoulder in length. Sara never knew her mother as her mother died in childbirth giving life to Sara. Her father, a Pennsylvanian mining engineer, raised her. Following the death of her mother, her father devoted himself entirely to the task of raising his only child. Her father never did remarry. As Sara grew older, an admiration developed in the man's parental achievements. When Sara came of age, she naturally desired to pursue a career in her father's line of work.

Sara met Jon at the university following the untimely death of Sara's father in an auto accident. Jon befriended Sara. He consoled her over her recent loss. Jon's had a unique perspective on this. He became

orphaned at the age of nine following the death of his parents in an airplane crash. Jon and Sara became the best of friends. Over time, the friendship developed into something a little bit more. Jon and Sara eventually married.

Jon was a year older than Sara, but as to wiser, that would be questionable. Jon was a very intelligent individual possessing an above average IQ. In the smarts department, Jon was exceptionally gifted. Unfortunately, Jon also had an impulsive streak bordering on brash. In the wisdom department, Sara held the upper hand. She possessed an average intelligence compounded with a conservative nature. Sara held the trump card over Jon with her maturity level. Sara would always opt for the safe, sure, and well thought out path. Jon, on the other hand, would plunge headlong with reckless abandon onto a course filled with uncertainties. Their contradictory personalities complemented each other and it proved to be why the two gravitated toward each other.

Sara and Jon's career paths took an unexpected turn. At the university, Sara was working towards an engineering degree in the area of minerals and mining. Jon was doing doctorate work in astrophysics and quantum theory. Neither of the two completed their studies nor did they ever graduate. While on a university sponsored Egyptian archeological dig expedition, the two discovered a long lost tomb. In that crypt, Jon and Sara uncovered the dust coated remains of a modern day laboratory. The tomb also contained a very special machine. It was a machine where a person could travel through time. The two made the machine operational. A series of adventures followed. Jon and Sara eventually met up with the inventor of the time machine, one Professor Joseph T. Brawn. They followed him back to his laboratory into an alternate universe. For the past year, Sara and Jon have been the professor's apprentices, exploring the vast realm of time travel on a firsthand basis.

Today though, the two are on a much needed vacation. Christmas time is a time to make merry and to recount the year gone by with friends and family. The New Year always holds hope in the future, but this holiday season only reminded Jon and Sara of how truly alone they are in the world. Using the time machine, they decided to escape the solitude of the Noel time season. They desired to travel to a warm,

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sunny, summertime spot. The two chose an Atlantic City resort early in the month of September. Late summer offered good sunny weather, miles of sparsely crowded beaches, a boardwalk lined with various shops to explore, and plenty of gaming action in the nightlife.

Sara didn't feel like sleeping. Her mind was very active. Her thoughts meandered through an odd assortment of past places and events that occurred in her life. Sara arose from the king size bed. She scanned the floor for her underwear. Sara located her pink panties near a cloth fabric covered chair. She found her bra amongst a heap of clothes piled next to the oak cabinet that housed the television set. Sara got dressed into her skivvies. She then located the hotel's complimentary full-length white robe and wrapped the housecoat about her. Upon tying the robe's cloth fastener about her midsection, Sara felt snug and secure in the downy material.

Sara walked toward the two sliding glass doors that separated the room from the balcony. Unlatching one door, she slid it open. An onrush of humid, heavy sea air struck her face. The outside air contrasted with the cool and dry air within the room. Sara kept walking out onto the balcony until she had reached the leftmost corner. Steadying herself on metal handrails, Sara gazed out into the night. It was a grand view from the twelfth floor ocean side suite under the moonlight. To her immediate left, a menagerie of brightly lighted high-rise buildings beckoned nightwalkers to patronize their casinos and bars. Straight ahead, the steady but gentle waves of the Atlantic Ocean rhythmically lapped at an unseen shoreline. Off to her left and a bit in the distance, a large wide pier supporting arcade and amusement establishments jetted into the water. To her right and facing south, rows of lights of less intensity trailed off into the distance. Sara could see the planks of a wooden boardwalk set inshore seventy-five feet parallel to the water's edge. Off on the horizon, an empty oil tanker riding high in the water lazily sailed its way down the southern coast. Sara began to ponder as to how much her life had been altered in finding the time machine and her subsequent meeting with the professor.

Professor Brawn was a moderately husky man, sixty-six years of age, who perpetually wore wire-rimmed glasses. He sported a neatly

trimmed heavysset beard. The professor always wore his light brown hair short. He always appeared dapper with a preference for wearing fine dark blue suits. The professor strongly resembled Colonel Sanders of the popular fried chicken chain except for the fact that the professor did not have a mustache. Professor Brawn spent his lifetime studying and experimenting on the physical properties of time before he actually built his working machine. All his work was of his own private undertaking. As such, he had no outside organization or government to answer to.

The professor actually developed two separate time travel apparatuses. The first piece of equipment, a six-foot high archway with racks of computer modules and generators, was the actual machine. It could transport a person through time. This machine was the culmination of thirty years of research. But this device had a serious drawback. While the machine could transport matter to any place or time of the operator's choosing, time travel could only be in one direction. It was only possible to transport material into the past. Time travel into the future was totally impossible using this machine. The professor's apparatus made use of singular directional wormholes to fold space and to create a rip in time. Forward directional wormholes, the basis for travel into the future, were theoretically possible, but it was beyond the professor's knowledge to create. With no practical way to return from a deep trek into the distant past, his temporal machine was virtually useless. A trip to the deep past was guaranteed to be a one-way trip.

Professor Brawn's solution to the time travel dilemma was the Tabichron. This portable AM-FM radio sized device is usually worn about the hip in a pouch. This piece of equipment is the mechanism to return from time trips. It makes use of the same wormhole technology that the time machine employs. This device is not exactly a time machine per se. Its function is not to propel a person through time. Instead, this gadget's purpose is to simply suspend a person into the time stream. The person is put into a state of limbo. Time eventually ages back to the point where the traveler began his trip. At that point, the user is reintegrated back into reality.

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If one looked on as a person using the time machine, it would appear that the traveler has gone nowhere. Outwardly, the traveler walks under the arches of the device without interruption. But in truth, during the wink of an eye, the traveler has gone, spent limitless time in the past, and then returned. So long as the traveler uses the Tabichron to return, the time trekker is but an instant older in the present even though he may have spent a lifetime in the past. Time is relative and the study of time is a study in relativity. Retrieving items out of the past is impossible as forward time travel is impossible. The traveler may only retain the memories of the trip. For this reason, this time machine had once been referred to as a “Dream Machine”. To transfer items from the past to the present, a traveler must be inventive. All objects must age with the timeline.

Sara’s thoughts wandered to her husband, Jon. Jon proved to be the ideal man in her extraordinary extended lifetime. The two worked well with each other. Neither Jon nor Sara was overbearing nor did they try to force their will upon each other. Their marriage proved to be an exceptionally long and a happy one. Their partnership has withstood the test of time. Sara giggled with an amusing thought. Only a time traveler could celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary under the age of twenty-five.

Sara was watching the oil tanker slowly cruise by. Her thoughts wandered to what her life in the future might hold. From her time traveling days, she knew leukemia would one day claim her life. Hope came only in what the modern medicine held. Already, the twentieth century has seen rapid advances in health care. The future might bring some form of advanced treatment or a possible cure significantly extending her lifespan. As her thoughts turned to the more immediate future, a deep melancholy set in. Sara always wanted to start a family someday. She wanted multiple children. Sara knew Jon. He would make an excellent father and she yearned to bear Jon’s child. But life dealt her a poor hand of cards to play. There would be much difficulty to overcome in achieving this end. Sara’s could not conceive children. Her fallopian tubes were irreversibly scarred from childhood due to a bout of Rheumatic fever. Twentieth century medicine could only provide her with some viable alternatives to natural reproduction.

Vitro fertilization was one option and the use of a surrogate mother was the other. Both alternatives were relatively time consuming in arranging doctor visits and lab tests. In Jon and Sara's hectic life, they could never find the time to make that happen. Sara understood all too well the drawbacks of living a limitless amount of time. The thing you want most of all can really be a never-ending wait.

Sara and Jon are special people in another regard. They were not born into this world timeline. Instead, they transferred from their alternate world into the professor's world. During one of Professor Brawn's time treks, he inadvertently altered history and wrote himself into nonexistence. Sara and Jon's alternate world resulted. Sara's world was not altogether different than Professor Brawn's world. For the most part, each world contained the same people, but these people acted upon a different set of historical events resulting from the professor's meddling of history. In the end, Sara's world became significantly different than the professor's world. Her alternate world would have continued on for an eternity but for the chance discovery of Professor Brawn's time machine. Before he vanished, the professor buried his prototype in the Egyptian desert. Jon and Sara discovered that machine and figured out how to make it work. Jon and Sara went on a few time-trekking adventures of their own before they found a compelling need to locate the professor. Sara correctly understood the fundamentals of time travel. Even when a time traveler does not exist in the current time, the past still contains the time traveler's echo. These duplicates are referred to as his clone. To find a clone, one merely has to search at a known place and time that the person once visited. In the end, the two young temporal travelers paired up with the professor's clone and the three of them transferred back into the professor's real world. The alternate reality that Jon and Sara came from became forever lost. They could never return nor did they have any desire to return. The two now work as the professor's aides.

In Professor Brawn's real world, duplicity now exists in an equivalent set of Jon and Sara, abet without the knowledge of the time machine. In both the real and alternate worlds, Sara's parents are deceased. Both died in similar fashions. That can not be said of Jon's parents. In his alternate world, Jon was orphaned at age nine. In the

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course of time trekking, Jon unwittingly altered the destiny of his mother. Due to that change, he found a compelling need to deliberately alter history yet again. He changed the fate of his father. Both of his parents are now alive and lead normal lives in the professor's timeline.

As positive as this change may seem, the real twisted truth slowly dawned on the time trekking Jon. It was not his parents he saved, but the parents of his duplicate living in Professor Brawn's world. While Jon could easily fool his parents into believing he was their son, he could not visit them on a regular basis. Jon did not have the additional fourteen years of shared memories. Also, there was the ever present danger of Jon meeting up with his double. That situation of having side by side identical twins would be unexplainable at best. Jon rarely visited his parents but on occasion he would talk with them over the telephone. Jon found he was somewhat alienated in this world.

With Jon and Sara, the absolute low point of their life was reached during the holiday season. Normally it is a time to visit family and friends. Yule time festivities only reminded the two of how much out of place they are. With Sara, it was more of a general overall feeling. But with Jon, he had to deal with the spitting images of his parents directly in front of him. At this time of the year, Jon found it to be the most difficult. He had to remind himself that he must maintain a distance from them at all times.

Jon and Sara decided that the best way to spend the holidays is to avoid them altogether. A vacation is what was needed. The time machine offered a convenient means to that end. A person could travel anywhere and to any time in the world. So on Christmas day on the eve of the new millennium, the two lonely souls escaped the real world. For the most part, Jon decided on where they would vacation. Time wise, Jon could have made his vacation for as long as he wanted. He decided to limit the vacation to a week. Jon theorized that a small break from the routine creates a sharper mind upon the return. Jon was a person who enjoyed the night life. He loved various games of chance. Hence, Jon would almost always select a place with a casino nearby. Jon was passionate about gaming. He reveled in the thrill of winning on the turn of a card. Sara nature was quite the opposite. She

would always check out a resort's other amenities such as the spa or the local restaurants.

Sara took a few steps toward the center of the balcony. The ship that caught Sara's eye was slowly fading from view on the southern horizon. Sara compared her life to that of the ship. She felt a touch of envy. The ship's life was so regular and routine. Barring stormy seas, the tanker would certainly return bearing a load of precious black gold to fuel a hungry city. Her life, while interesting and exciting, was not routine. One day Sara could be time tripping to any place in the past. The next day she could be working with the professor writing computer code for some time related algorithm. Perhaps it was Sara's real age catching up with her. Sara craved normalcy in her everyday life. One day she hoped to settle down and concentrate on raising a family.

Sara gazed upwards at the stars in the night sky. A light haze, formed from the local air pollution and the casino's bright lights, masked the true beauty in the panorama of stars that shone in the night. The false star, Venus, glowed brightly in the east above a calm sea. Starlight of Polaris osculated in brightness and intensity due to the smog in the atmosphere. Sara made out the constellation of the big dipper and she marveled at the sight. Star gazing brought back memories of her father, Frank Underwood. When Sara was young, she and her father would stare at the stars during warm summer nights. Her father would point out each star by name and also identify some of the constellations. Frank would tell her wild tales of heavenly creatures battling for control of the cosmos and how a particular constellation earned its place in the night sky.

One crazy tale always stuck in her mind. It was her father's often repeated fable of the falling star. While most of her father's yarns were no more than fertilizer for a young hungry mind, Sara later realized the true motive behind the falling star tale. Her father greatly missed her mother. This was his way of asking her for guidance. As Mr. Underwood explained the tale, when human beings die, their spirit goes to the heavens, literally. A new star is born in the night sky where the soul of the deceased occupies it. While those on earth live out their lives, the spirits of the departed mutely watches over the lives of their

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loved ones. Sometimes, when we mortals are in times of great need, the stars whisper insight and guidance to help the living through the trying times. But stars, like men, eventually grow old and unneeded. At an appropriate time, they announce their death by streaking down to Earth in a blaze of glory. During a star's death dive, fine particles of stardust flake off. On these magical grains of sand, a wish may be granted. As Sara grew older, she didn't actually believe that such wishing on a falling star could come true. Nevertheless, something inside her also reminded her that there was no harm in trying either. So on some nights, she would look into the night sky with hope in her heart and a desire on her mind.

A cool breath of sea air distracted Sara from her heavenly watch. She moved her head a bit and a glint of reflected light stabbed her eye. The luminosity came from the corner of the balcony floor rather than skyward. Curiously, Sara gave the area a closer inspection. Within a crack at the base of the hand rails, Sara picked up a small shiny disc wedged in the corner. Bringing the slug closer into the available light, she saw that it was a shiny brand new penny.

"Well", Sara thought, "perhaps the night will not be a total loss. Finding a penny is considered to be good luck". She held the coin in her hand and then decided to call it a night. As she began walking back toward the doorway, she gave one last hopeful look towards the heavens. As if not to disappoint her silent prayer, the constellation of Gemini exploded with activity. A bright fireball, seemingly hurled by one of the celestial twins, flared in the heavens. It traveled like a rocket trailing flames across the night sky. This rather large chunk of space debris flirted with the Earth's gravitational forces as it skipped through the upper atmosphere. The ever present planetary pull eventually won out. The space body succumbed. The blazing ball began to fall to earth in a long shallow arc. Meteors normally light up the sky for a fraction of a second. This celestial orb spat fire, flames, and hot plasma for an extraordinary five seconds. Sara couldn't resist such an occasion. She made her wish on this freakish falling star. For as long as this fireball fell, Sara repeated her wish. She got to say it three times. The flaming orb arced low to the horizon, and it crashed to Earth somewhere in the Canadian wilderness.

Just by wishing, Sara's optimism in the future increased. A little thing called hope can do that. Still clutching the penny in her right hand, Sara returned inside. She placed the penny on the nightstand by her bedside. The penny had already proved itself lucky. It is best to hold onto such things. A little extra luck in a casino is not a bad thing. Feeling tired and contented, Sara retired for the evening.

The morrow came all too soon. Jon begrudgingly awakened on the sound of the telephone ringing. His bloodshot eyes opened to a ray of glaring sunlight being reflected off the television screen. He immediately winched. A cordial voice on the other end of the telephone informed him of the time. Jon thanked the hotel staff employee for the courtesy wakeup call. He gently hung up the receiver. Gradually awakening, Jon could hear the hotel maids in the hallway. Apparently, the cleaners were getting a head start on their daily chores. Jon began nudging a semi-sleeping Sara to inform her that it was time to get up.

Jon didn't feel well. Gas seemed to be collecting in his intestines. Internal bowel movements could be felt. Jon clearly regretted consuming too much greasy finger food from the night before. Almost in unison, both Jon and Sara rose from the bed, and they stretched their limbs. Jon felt the immediate need to relieve himself. He started heading for the bathroom. Sara quickly dashed in front of him and cut him off. Jon understood the love affair women have with bathrooms. Sara was no exception to the rule. Jon resigned himself to the fact that it would be quite awhile before Sara came out again. Feeling bloated, he patiently waited his turn.

Jon dressed in an outfit of a tan pants and white short sleeve shirt. A pair of highly shined black oxford dress shoes completed his ensemble. These were the clothes he originally checked into the hotel with. Jon selected for Sara a lightweight, pink colored, knee length dress. He also set aside her favorite sandal shoes. The two time trekkers had come to the resort with very little in luggage. A simple small valise case packed with only a single change of clothes each. Additional outfits, dresses, and bathing suits were all purchased at the local stores. The extra clothes proved to be a minor inconvenience. The clothes were objects of this time period. The Tabichron would not

be able to transport them back when they returned. Jon rummaged through the room picking up all the remaining clothes. He crudely stuffed them into some shopping bags. It was Jon's intention to dispose of the brand new clothes into the nearest trash receptacle or dumpster he found.

Nearing the checkout hour of eleven o'clock, Sara eventually exited her grooming room. She felt fresh as a daisy. Jon made quick use of the vacated facilities while Sara started to dress. Once Jon had done his business, Jon began to urge Sara to hurry it up. Sara, still fussing with her earrings, didn't quite understand the urgency.

"Jon, what's the rush? Don't we have all the time in the world?" She asked.

"The professor requested that I do him a small favor. He wants me to bring back some more money. He needs another fifty thousand to be precise. Today we go back on the clock." Jon replied. Sara was befuddled.

"More money? What's he up to now?" Sara queried. Jon, in the process of rounding up all the shopping bags of clothing as well as his own luggage, tried to explain.

"Well as you know, the professor has been exceptionally busy these past six months. You might say he's a regular workaholic. There's a reason for this. A while ago, he made some monumental breakthrough in his time theories. He's been working at a fever pitch ever since. All I know it has something to do with the device that we got off of the man from the future, Jonas Walker. Now the professor is trying to put those theories to the test. He's building a new machine." Jon explained.

"You mean the professor has reverse engineered that future gizmo? Oh my, no wonder the professor is so ecstatic. That device is right up his alley. He must be in seventh heaven if he has figured it out." Sara countered.

"Professor Brawn has been buying all sorts of parts for a new machine. He's bought new computer gear, generators, and all sorts of electrical components. But right now, he's short on funds so I assume he'll be buying more gear." Jon added.

Fundraising to a time tripper means using the time machine for profit. One travels to a gambling establishment, notes the winning numbers, and returns again to make the winning bets. Money won is then placed into an interest bearing account that will be available for withdrawal at a later date. As two trips to the same timeline are required, a major pitfall that can occur is when the former self happens to bump into the latter self. The former self, or clone as it is called, is a living breathing entity created by reality. If the former self sees the latter self, he may alter his actions. Generally, that is not a good thing. Clones that run around in the past will almost certainly alter history in some way. The Tabichron addresses this duplicity problem with a secondary function of clone control. The Tabichron only allows non-clones to suspend in the timeline. A clone is destroyed upon using the Tabichron. Both Sara and Jon know this. If they ever realized in their time travels that they are clones, they would not willingly destroy themselves.

Sara saw where this was leading. She recalled the time when she tagged along with Jon on another one of his fund raising treks. At that time, an inexperienced Jon failed to follow the professor's explicit instructions. The trip was a bust. Even though a considerable amount of time has passed since then, Sara still occasionally taunts Jon over the incident. The use of the word "bonehead" in her sentences is a nagging pointed reminder of Jon's failure that day.

"Oh Jon, I hope it's not going to be roulette again. You wouldn't want to repeat that bonehead play." Sara teased. Jon became obviously irked.

"Hardy. Har. Har. I screw up once, and now I am reminded for life. Never mind the fact that I improved the professor's method and I have successfully used it for quite a while now." Jon responded. With surprise on her painted face, Sara became genuinely intrigued. She wanted to know more. In a befuddled voice, she posed her question.

"How exactly do you improve making a buck off gambling? I mean, no matter what the game is, the hand of man is always involved. When man is involved, there's always a chance that the timing can change by something you do. You should know. Timing is everything. Whether it is a hand of cards, the roll of dice, or the spinning wheel of

roulette nothing can be absolutely certain when the human factor comes into play. How do you improve upon that? Sara asked.

“Easy. You just hit upon the problem exactly. The answer to your question is self evident. You simply have to take the human factor out of the equation. Have you ever heard of the game of Keno?” Jon calmly retorted.

“Of course. The game is to pick an exact series of numbers from a fixed pool of total numbers. Usually twenty numbers are selected out of a total pool of eighty. You can bet on any series from one to twelve numbers.” Sara responded.

“Exactly. And did you know that those selections are actually picked by a computer? The mechanical machines are equipped with random number generators. In the old days, it was different. The game used to be played by a human being pulling numbered ping pong balls out of a fish bowl. In the high tech world of today, it’s a machine making all the selections. The human factor is totally removed.” Jon said.

“I’m impressed.” Sara said.

“By correctly selecting a ten number sequence, the prize happens to be one hundred thousand dollars. Eleven or twelve number sequences get even larger prizes, but why get greedy. Extremely large payouts will only draw unwanted attention to the winner.” Jon continued.

“So you tell me. What can go wrong? What events can happen where the numbers don’t come out exactly the same?” a suspicious Sara inquired.

“Well, the only situation I can see is if the computer system has internal programs to monitor the bets and influence the picks. That scenario would be out and out cheating. It’s possible, but it hasn’t happened in all the betting parlors I’ve been in so far.” Jon said.

Sara became a bit perplexed. She asked the obvious question.

“I assume state lotteries work the same way. I guess I don’t understand why you go to a casino. I mean with all the betting parlors a state lottery has, you would almost guarantee not to bump into your clone. Why does it have to be a casino?” Sara queried.

“Absolutely true. A public lottery would be ideal in that regard. But public lotteries also publicize the big winners in newspapers and TV. Casinos do not. Publicity is something we don’t want. It would look very strange should the same person win twenty state lotteries over a ten year period.” Jon explained. Sara still was at a loss about a few things.

“So are you just going to walk in there, make one bet, and then walk out with the cash? Won’t that raise an eyebrow? Sara asked.

“Not exactly. I’ll put in the bet well ahead of time. I’ll play it for twenty draws. The winning bet will be in the middle somewhere. Once I win, there will be a little time in filling out the paperwork. I’ll be using the phony id that I brought with me. There’s no need to let Uncle Sam whack us for back taxes when we get home. Now, please look lively. I don’t want to be late.” Jon explained.

Sara finished putting on her jewelry. Mentally, she ran a check list as to what she may have forgotten. Sara didn’t like to be rushed. It definitely did not suit her style. It always irked and unbalanced her. There’s always something that gets left behind. Jon, with hands full of shopping bags, was already by the door. Sara looked about the room one last time. Barring the scattered blankets of a mussed up bed, the room was very tidy. The maid will not have much work to do here. About then, it struck her. In Jon’s rush to leave, he had failed to leave the cleaner crew the customary tip. Sara quickly located her purse from within her black leather pocketbook. She withdrew some one dollar bills for the gratuity. Sara corrected Jon’s faux pas by placing three one dollar bills on the nightstand by the bed. It was then that she noticed the penny lying there. Immediately she realized this was the lucky cent she discovered on the balcony the night before. In one fluent move, Sara placed the gratuity on the nightstand and scooped up the coin. She deposited the red cent within her pocketbook.

Jon made haste out the door. Sara did her best to follow. Jon found difficulty in carrying both the shopping bags and his own luggage. He bore the burden without complaint even though Sara had both her hands free. Jon made for the elevator at the far end of a long corridor. Two dark skinned cleaning ladies, each pushing yellow cleaning dollies, held a miniature conference in the center hallway.

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The two maids chatted amongst themselves in their native Spanish. They seemed to be oblivious to the two departing guests. By coincidence, as Sara skirted to the left of the carts, both maids view of Jon became temporarily blocked. Jon, slyly and effortlessly, used this time to relieve himself of the burden of carrying the excess clothing. In one fluent motion, he quickly placed the loops of the bags over hooks at the rear of one of the carts. Sara watched and smiled. Clever, she thought, to donate the clothes to someone who could use them rather than just tossing them into the trash.

Jon, now carrying just one small bag of luggage, headed for the elevator by taking more vigorous steps in his stride. As Sara's sandals were not designed for speed, Sara followed the best she could. When Jon reached the elevator and made the car call, Sara found a few moments to catch her breath. The elevator serviced many of the upper floors. The wait for the car was measured in minutes.

As Sara and Jon patiently waited, a short old lady with a leather eye patch over her right eye approached. She walked slowly with the aid of a polished hickory cane. The feisty battle hardened woman stood about five feet two inches tall. She appeared to be approximately eighty years old. The woman carried no purse or bag, but wore a fashionable black leather hip case about her waist. Sara could not help but notice the fine quality of the clothes she wore. Augmenting her clothes, this lady sported a cultured pearl necklace and one finely crafted gold wristwatch. Clearly, this woman was used to the finer things in life.

In a short while, a resounding ding announced that the elevator had arrived. A few longish seconds later, the door opened to an empty car. The shiny stainless steel car measured four feet by eight feet. Jon scrambled in first ignoring proper etiquette. Sara graciously allowed the slower arthritic old lady to go ahead of her. Once the elderly woman was onboard, Sara boarded. The three patiently waited for the door to shut. Before long, the elevator began its eleven-floor descent down to the hotel lobby.

In mute silence, the elevator with its three passengers began a slow descent. As the elevator passed the seventh floor, that's when the strange noises began. The noise seemed to reverberate off the steel

walls of the car. At first, the sound began as a low, slowly mooing cow. Toward the end of the reverberation, gurgling noises could be heard. Sara knew immediately what the noise was. Jon's digestive track was all amiss. His bodily fluids were internally moving about. Sara giggled to herself. She even caught herself in an audible chuckle. Sara turned her head away. She placed a hand over her face, vainly attempting to suppress the laughter.

The humorous situation instantly changed. A powerful putrid smell struck Sara like a right cross from a heavyweight boxer. The overpowering odorous stench of a silent and deadly fart bombarded her nostrils making breathing through the nose virtually impossible. With each non-nasal breath she took, the foul air seemed to coat her mouth with a putrid taste of green slime. There was no escaping the sewer stench. They were in a gas chamber enclosed within the steel box of the elevator. Sara turned and menacingly stared at Jon. In polite mute silence, her eyes screamed, "Jon, How dare you? We are in an elevator!" As though the old lady burped, she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh My". Not a word further came out of the three passengers. Each rider held their breath, politely held their tongue, and prayed for a swift end to the elevator ride.

The old woman proved to be very agile. Upon arrival, she bolted free out the door first and scampered away. In unison, Sara and Jon exited gulping fresh air. Once free of the enclosed space and upon seeing the old woman hobble off, Sara let her feeling known in no uncertain terms. She instinctively punched Jon in the arm. Jon reeled a bit, but to Sara's amazement, Jon started laughing uncontrollably. In between his chuckles, Jon let it be known, "It wasn't me. God! That one was potent." Sara, judging by Jon's reactions, knew she had made an error in her assumptions. The old lady must have been the cause of the odorous contamination. She only smirked. Sara silently expressed gratitude at breathing clean air.

The elevator deposited the two into the hotel's spacious main lobby. Two cheery faced young female hotel employees manned computer consoles atop a long bar shaped desk. A number of new hotel guests were in a line and in the process of checking into the hotel. Coming from the nearby casino, muted musical notes sung by

slot machines could be heard in the background. Off to the left, a small segregated area containing a number of plush chairs allowed guests to read a newspaper in relative peace and quiet. At night, a small bar served nightcaps to any lobbyists seeking refreshment. To the right, a boulevard containing boutiques offered patrons an assortment of knick-knacks and clothing. These stores operated only during business hours during the day. Most of these boutiques made up for their limited space by vertically stacking their merchandise up along the walls. Shops selling a menagerie of jewelry, clothing, leather goods, wigs, tobacco products, and souvenir goods sold their items at substantially marked up prices. At a forty-five degree angle leftward, twin glass doors built into a double high glass pane wall allowed street access to both the hotel and casino. The casino itself was built within a separate room. Naturally, it was constructed within a beeline path from the street. The mall and hotel lobby were well lit with refracted sunlight. A large double set of steel doors marked the domain of the casino. The casino entrance faced the street and was perpendicular to the hotel lobby. Lighting within the casino itself was controlled. The casino's doors never shut. They needed to be continually guarded by the house security to detract underage dreamers from trying their luck at chance. Questionable youths were routinely carded.

"I didn't want to tell you in the elevator, but I've seen that old lady before. I happened to notice her or rather my clone will notice her." Jon mentioned. Sara perked up. She watched the old woman walking away with her cane. She eventually disappeared into the bowels of the casino.

"I call her 'Lady One Eye'." When the casino isn't crowded she plays slot machines. She will walk down the rows of slot machines and try her luck once on each one. Today luck will favor the woman of advanced age. She is about to win a car." Jon continued. Sara didn't quite understand. She cut in on Jon and asked to explain that remark further.

"Excuse me. Did you say a car? Exactly how does a slot machine pay out a car?" Sara queried.

"You would know if you went into the casino more often. Haven't you noticed the casino's special promotions? The casino is giving

away an auto a day for thirty days. It's called 'Thirty cars in thirty days'. There are numerous banner ads through out the casino. A jackpot hit on any especially marked machine will win you a brand new car. Our good friend Lady One Eye has a date with destiny. She'll hit the jackpot today." Jon replied. Sara became a bit puzzled. The whole promotion didn't quite add up.

"I guess I don't see how a promotion like that can be controlled. I mean, if jackpots occur randomly, then how can there be exactly one jackpot per day?" Sara queried. Jon smiled.

"I see your point. I've been wondering about that too. If the slot machine is fair, there would be no way to make that guarantee." Jon countered. Jon continued to think about the subject.

"You know, it's always an old lady or an elderly man who wins these promotions. It's never someone youthful or someone that could use a good boost to their income. I suspect the fix is in. Maybe there's someone in the back room monitoring a camera and he is actually selecting the winner. But I really don't know for sure." Jon added. He suddenly became aware of the time.

"We've got to move. Quickly, let's go over there by the chairs. We'll be in the shadows." Jon said with urgency. Jon grabbed Sara's arm and together they began to quickly walk toward two seats in a darkened corner. The plush leather bound seats faced each other. They canted at forty-five degrees toward the casino entrance. Once Jon had reached the seats, he felt more at ease.

"We'll be okay here. Have a seat. Take a load off your feet." Jon said. Unnerved by Jon's abrupt behavior, Sara wanted answers.

"What's going on Jon? Why do you rush me out of the hotel room only to have me wait here in the lobby?" Sara demanded. Jon sank comfortably down within the luxurious seat. Jon unburdened himself of carrying the suitcase. He faced Sara and casually pointed towards the casino entrance.

"Take a look over there. Watch. My clone is due to arrive." Jon explained. Jon's timing was right on the money. Within thirty seconds of Jon's last statement, Sara saw Jon's clone walk through the outer doors from the street. With a certain spring to his step, he crossed the open area of the enclosed mall making a direct path to the casino. Sara

looked on intently. What amazed Sara most of all was the fact that the clone was dressed identical to Jon right down to the shine in his shoes. Both even carried Tabichrons in a case on their waists. For a few moments, the clone could be seen chatting with one of the guards at the casino entrance. In all her time travels, Sara never really watched a real life instant replay. This was a new experience to her.

“This is really weird. It’s like watching yourself on an interactive three-d television.” Sara said. Then she became curious and wondered out loud,

“Could you tell exactly what the clone will do while he’s here at the casino? I wouldn’t want to accidentally bump into him. That could be the cause of some other problem.” Sara asked. Jon clued Sara in.

“After thanking the employee for the directions, I started walking to the back of the room. I went by a side room devoted to slot machines. A fire red convertible in a central showroom display caught my eye. I stopped and admired the auto for a while. While doing so, a woman, who I call Lady One Eye, seemed to be playing oddly. She would move up and down the line of slots. B to each slot, she would only play the machine once. It didn’t matter whether she won or not. She would just take her winnings and then move on. This lady’s modus operandi was very curious to watch. After a minute or so, I got back to business.” Jon said. Jon briefly paused for a moment to catch his breath. His mouth was becoming dry from the longish explanation. He felt the need to wet his whistle. In short order, Jon continued.

“With the casino not being particularly crowded at this hour, I reached the Keno lounge in five minutes or so. The lounge itself is very simple. It has nothing more than a few rows of seats in front of a computer display with eighty numbers. A casino employee sits behind a small desk. She processes each patron’s paper bets by running them through a computer. Each game occurs five minutes apart with the winning numbers illuminated on the panel. Between draws, it’s like watching paint dry. So while in the lounge, I enjoyed a drink of rum and coke just to kill time. I wanted to give my later-self ample time to place the bet. At ten minutes of the hour, I copied down on the winning set of numbers on a sheet of paper. As you know, objects out of the past such as paper can’t be transported forward in time. This

meant I had to memorize at least ten of the winning numbers before I returned.” Jon explained. Jon took a moment to gather his thought. Shortly, he continued.

“While I was leaving, I heard the noisiest slot machine ever wailing. Bells, whistles and sirens were going off. It sounded like a fire alarm. That’s when I happened to notice Lady One Eye at a distance. She was standing next to the special promotional slot machine for winning the car. A tall suited man came up to her. He shook her hand and congratulated her for her winnings. Lady One Eye had just hit the jackpot. The grand prize of a red sports car was hers. I could mentally read the headline, ‘Eighty year old goes eighty. Wins roadster’. Go figure. Then I walked off. I spent about an hour sitting on a park bench by the beach memorizing the winning numbers. After that, I returned home. Thereafter, we immediately began our vacation.” Jon finished his narration. At this point, Jon was definitely in need of a drink. A bad case of dry mouth formed from telling his story. Jon glanced at the time on his pocket watch. He was running late versus his plans. Sara attempted to respond to Jon’s story.

“Well, you have been busy. I can’t ...” Sara said but she was interrupted by Jon.

“I hate to act herky-jerky to you again, but the clock is ticking. I have less than a twenty-minute window to get the Keno bet in. Don’t worry. I won’t be colliding with my clone. The casino has plenty of Keno betting stations where I can put in the bet. Right now I have to run.” Jon continued. Jon rose out of his seat leaving his black luggage bag by the chair’s side. Sara started to rise too expecting to be Jon’s escort. Jon cut in.

“No, you wait here. You’ll only slow me down.” Jon warned. Almost as an after thought, Jon retorted, “Better yet, why don’t you window shop in the mall for half an hour. After that we can have a bite to eat in a restaurant somewhere. Go anywhere, but stay out of the casino or directly in the hotel lobby. My clone will be walking straight out to the street. I’ll meet you here sometime after the top of the hour.” Jon ordered. It may be that Jon truly expected to be faster without the extra baggage of Sara tagging along. Perhaps too, Jon still had the

‘bonehead’ crack in the back of his mind. In any event, Jon gracelessly left his wife.

With that, Jon bounded off towards the casino. Sara was in a slow burn. She was miffed at Jon. Jon had plenty of time over their vacation to let Sara know what was going to happen. Sara felt like a dumped date. It was very inconsiderate of Jon to have treated her this way. Sara was really annoyed at how this morning had started out. Rush out of the room, and then forced to wait in the lobby. Even Jon’s stereotypical suggestion got under her skin. He expected her to pass her time window-shopping. During her seven day vacation, Sara had gone into every shop and boutique the mall had to offer. She could quote Jon on each store’s offerings right down to the price. What Sara did not do over her vacation was gamble. She only went into the casino once during her stay. Sara spent her time as stress free as possible mainly soaking up the sun, shopping, and enjoying fine dining. By this time, Sara could see that Jon had crossed the outer lobby. He began to enter the casino. Be it Jon’s inconsideration or his lack of attention toward his wife, Sara desired to deliver some choice words to Jon.

Sara popped out of her chair, bent on chasing after Jon. Her handbag swung through the air on its straps. She was not in the mood to sit around and wait. Sara abandoned their luggage where it lay. She hurriedly walked as fast as her sandals would allow her to walk through the hotel lobby. In the process, she dodged a few baggage-bearing guests. Upon entering the casino, Sara wanted to keep going, but the guard challenged her. Youthful looking Sara knew it was pointless to argue with the gate guardian. She had to accept a few lost moments in verifying her age. Once the sentry was satisfied, Sara looked about the casino for any sign of Jon.

The house of chance used a minefield of brightly lit slot machines to both welcome guests into and to be the final barrier out of the gambling establishment. Beyond the three rows of one armed bandits, the room opened up to a spacious high ceiling rectangular shaped area. In the distance, Sara could see the neat rows of various gaming tables. Around the perimeter of the building, slot machines of various denominations beckoned players with mechanical gaming enjoyment.

At this hour of the day, only a handful of tourists and die hard gamblers frequented the facility. Even on the tables, only a modest numbers of sitting players were actively gaming. Spacious side rooms annexed the main gaming area. Each adjoining room sported a different theme. They usually contained the standard myriad of slot machines with specific types of table games. Above a nearby staircase, a large trident style arrow denoted the downward direction to the hellish poker room below. Along the long side in the main room, short lines of people congregated near the cash redemption cages. All rooms within the central casino had trademark high ceilings. Dark reflective panels concealed the numerous eyes in the sky that ensured honesty among the gambling community. At all hours of the day, mellow lighting bathed the casino rooms in a dim twilight.

Sara hoped to catch sight of Jon, but the task proved fruitless. She panoramically scanned the floor but to no avail. Jon apparently had dropped out of sight into one of the annex rooms. Sara was aware of the time. She knew she had about twenty minutes or so before Jon's clone was due to exit. Plenty of time, she thought. Somewhat frustrated, Sara decided that it was probably best to just leave. She could hide out in the mall as Jon had directed. As she was leaving, Sara's eyes caught sight of one of the banners for the special casino promotion. Within an annex room amid a Mecca of slot machines, the headline sign read, 'Thirty cars in Thirty Days'. Curious, Sara drew closer. Underneath the sign, a monster one armed bandit standing twelve feet tall let everyone know how to go about winning the prize.

It was then that Sara saw the car. It was a fiery red, two-door, 1995 Mitsubishi Eclipse Convertible waxed to a high gloss showroom shine. While the auto was obviously a year end model, it graced the center showcase nonetheless. The auto sported a modified low hung suspension, a customized chrome dual exhaust, low profile tires, bucket seats, and a rear racing wing. This was not your everyday car, but a car built for show, muscle, and speed. Sara fell in love with the car at first sight. She imagined herself in sunglasses driving carefree down the highway. With the top down and basking in the glow of a warm afternoon sun, she mentally cruised along the road. The dream left her feeling extremely contented. Sara had always wanted to own a

convertible. Before her, she saw the ideal sports car of her dreams. Sara really wanted to possess this dream car. She just stood transfixed as if in another world.

Sara's trance broke suddenly. Out of a corner of her eye, she recognized the old woman from the elevator. Lady One Eye was hobbling along with the use of her cane. She was playing the slots. The aged woman had just completed a center row of machines. She was working her way down another. Sara just watched her. Lady One Eye would pull the lever once, wait a moment, and then move on. Very few people were in the room at this hour with the vast majority of the one armed bandits going unused. One could almost time how long it would take before the old woman reached the mega-sized slot machine. Almost to confirm her estimate, Sara looked at her watch. "Yup", she whispered, "It'll be about fifteen minutes to show time." It was very difficult for Sara to comprehend what an eighty year old would do with a racing sports car. Sara figured that the woman would either give the vehicle to a grandchild or she would end up selling the car off for cash. In either event, the old woman could not possibly appreciate nor deserve to win the car.

In Sara's mind, a small battle of thoughts began to brew. It was if a haloed angelic hovered next to her ear while a little invisible devil floated above her shoulder. On one hand, Sara felt a strong materialistic selfish desire to possess the sports car. Sara's strong moral principals balanced this craving. In her mental debate, these two forces collided headlong. She was absolutely against altering history in any way if it could be helped. She knew there would be some kind of repercussion. Just by knowing when the jackpot would be hit gave her the power to change history. Both the imp and the angel whispered their viewpoints in her ears.

Sara strongly believed that a rippling effect always carries forward to the present when time in the past is altered. Because of her very conservative nature, Sara very adamantly believed that time trekkers must never change the past. Change a man's life and he in effect changes other people's lives. Even when a time traveler intentionally alters events, there always seems to be some unforeseen consequence as a result. Looking at the car's beautiful sleek body, Sara's ideals

collided headlong with her desire. Sara was not totally against changing history. She could accept Jon's method of allocating funds for the future. His method causes very little to change but the ebb and flow of casino gambling dollars. Changing the natural course of people's lives is what Sara always had an issue with.

The eventual re-appearance of Jon's clone only complicated matters. The clone is a living breathing person created by time's reiteration. If the clone is not destroyed or erased from the time stream, rippling side effects occur. The clone is an extra person in history and potentially a double person in the present. All issues with undestroyed clones are best solved by never getting into those scenarios in the first place.

It seems like the devil got the better of the argument when Sara finally wrestled out a decision. A fiendish grin slowly crossed her face. Sara chose to lower her standards a tad in the face of material want. Sara knew time was short. There were things she had to do first. Sara scurried back through the casino reversing the way she came in. Sara made all haste for the shopping mall.

Chapter 2

Nearly three hours had passed since Jon left Sara by herself. Jon sat in the same hotel lobby seat as before. He had discovered his black leather suitcase resting untouched beside the chair. Jon was not overly concerned with leaving his clothes behind, but Sara's absence concerned him. Jon understood that Sara could lose herself in her shopping endeavors. Impatience set in after his second hour of waiting, but he continued to bide his time. By the third hour, now he became worried. He had to control an antsy urge to go off and find her. The hotel hallway had become busier by the hour. Small groups of people were heading directly into the casino. Occasionally, porters would enter off the street bearing multiple suitcases for those couples desiring a night's stay. Jon knew staying put was the easiest way to find someone. He steadfastly adhered to that idiom. The adage proved easier said than done. Jon was rapidly reaching the point where his concern outweighed the logic behind the saying.

As Jon continued his vigilant watch of the outer lobby, he almost didn't notice a young girl walking towards him. She had a lively snap to her gait. This energetic female sported extremely long straight blond hair that extended halfway down her front torso. Her head was topped in a large brimmed tan beach hat and a wispy scarf. Indifferently, Jon watched her walking toward him. He continued a farsighted scan for Sara. It wasn't until the woman was virtually on top of him before he got pleasantly surprised. Up close, Jon realized it was his wife. She looked completely different in wearing a wig under her hat.

"Sorry to make you wait so long, but I had a few things to do." Sara said. In a very concerned voice, Jon asked his double question.

“Where have you been? And what’s up with the wig? I almost didn’t recognize you.” Jon mentioned. Jon started to rise from his seat, but Sara stopped him. She saw the worry on Jon’s face.

“Relax. Sit down. Everything’s fine. We have a short wait anyway.” Sara responded attempting to ease Jon’s troubled mind. Jon sat back in the leather chair, but he was unconvinced that all was well. He knew in time he’d find out. Jon patiently waited on Sara to carry a nearby hard wood seat next to his chair. Sara calmly sat down. She began the talking.

“Okay, I assume you have done the professor’s little errand by now. Is that all done yet?” she asked.

“Sure. Went like clockwork. I cashed out about an hour ago. I put a little over seventy-five thousand into the professor account.” Jon replied.

“Excellent. I’ve been busy too.” Sara continued. She opened her purse and withdrew a set of keys. With a face full of accomplishment, she dangled them at chest level in front of Jon.

“We now own a car.” Sara said with pride. Jon stared at Sara. His face instantly transformed from anxiety to a large glowing smile on the good news. He was happy for Sara. While Jon was curious about her different look, his previously plaguing worries became ghosts in the wind. As he was about to congratulate her, the well wish words choked in his mouth before leaving. Jon’s beaming open-faced grin transformed to a face of absolute dread. He was beginning to realize the reason behind Sara concealing outfit. Another altogether different concern overcame his thoughts.

“Where did you get the car?” Jon asked with directness. He both hoped and prayed that the answer was not the expected one.

“Why from the casino of course. I won it playing the slots.” Sara responded. She continued, “It’s an absolutely fantastic car. It’s my dream car. I can’t wait to put the road under those wheels.” Sara wanted to say more accolades, but Jon cut her off.

“How could you? I expressly told you to stay out of the casino. What if you interfered with the actions of my clone? Just the sight of you would be a dead giveaway.” Jon barked.

“I don’t think your clone recognized me. I’m positive of that. This minute, you didn’t even recognize me.” Sara mentioned.

“This isn’t like you. Why are you taking needless chances?” Jon rebutted. Sara’s good spirited mood changed. She got defensive. Sara thought a double standard existed. It’s okay when Jon acts reckless. Why should it be any different for Sara acts like so too.

“Chill out. Do you think I was born yesterday? Surely, I’m smarter than any clone.” Sara indignantly responded. This last statement did not sit well with Jon. In reality, when Sara spoke about Jon’s clone, she was really speaking about Jon.

“Did she really mean that she thinks she is smarter than me?” Jon pompously thought to himself. Jon carefully controlled his anger. He did not want open warfare to erupt in the battle of the sexes. Jon needed to find out exactly what happened.

“Please tell me what you did. Start from the top.” Jon delicately asked. Sara relaxed. She adjusted her posture in the not too comfortable hard wood chair.

“Okay then. I didn’t particularly like the way you treated me this morning. I was very angry with you. We will have words on this later. That’s the reason why I went into the casino in the first place. I was chasing after you. As I couldn’t find you, I did happen to come up the car in the display. It was love at first sight. For that point on, my mind was made up. I wanted the car.” Sara said. Jon butted into her conversation.

“Look. My memory is very clear. What I saw, my clone should also have seen too. I remember a nice old lady winning that car. Now instead, my clone will see you. There’s a disaster in the making.” Jon cautioned.

“Don’t remind me of that witch. That old hag was anything but nice. All manner of foul words came out of that old crone’s mouth. She even tried to claim the car was hers even after I won it.” Sara snapped back.

“I think you are getting ahead of yourself. Slow down. Tell me what happened in order please.” Jon said. Sara recomposed herself.

“I recalled what you told me this morning. I knew I needed a disguise of some kind. I figured out I had about fifteen minutes. So I

ran off and I got the wig and the hat. From shopping previously, I knew exactly what stores sold them. In short order, I grabbed the merchandise, and I flew out the storeroom door letting the merchants keep the change. I must say this whole affair was rather thrilling. I thought my actions were rather clever.” Sara related.

“I’ll give you clever, but please continue.” Jon hesitantly replied

“After a few moments of getting the hair on straight, I was back in the casino. It was not a moment too soon. I made it back within about a minute to spare. As I arrived, the old woman was finishing off the last bank of slots.” Sara continued. Sara paused for a moment as if to group her thoughts. In a moment, she continued her tale.

“Now I could have just hopped on the winning machine’s stool and played. But I remembered what you told me this morning. The only way I could guarantee to be the winner was to swap my coin for the old lady’s at the last possible second. With that said, I feinted that I was gazing about. Actually, I was waiting in ambush. My heart pumped wildly like a cat stalking a bird. Quite frankly, I’ve never done this before. The whole affair was exceptionally titillating. The one eyed lady finally made her move. She casually walked toward the prize machine, with her hand extended and a coin ready to put down the slot.” Sara recapped. She began to hesitate, fumbling to find the words. Sara knew exactly what she wanted to say, but she didn’t exactly want to say it that way. Jon picked up upon her non-fluent words. A touch of concern started to brew.

“You didn’t hurt the old lady did you?” Jon asked.

“No, I’d never do that. But I might have been a little rougher than I am proud to admit. At the last possible second, I cut in front of the old woman. With a quick hip check, I knocked her out of the way. Then I plopped myself upon the stool, put my coin down the slot, and pulled the lever. The wheels of the slot machine began to spin. While I was sitting there, I religiously faced the machine so as not to give your clone anything to see. That later proved more difficult than I thought. The little bump I gave the old woman knocked her back a few feet, but she stayed upright.” Sara responded.

“I can’t believe you would do that. Eighty-year old women are fragile. She could have fallen and broke her bones.” Jon retorted.

“In hindsight, I admit that it wasn’t a good idea. But fragile is not the word to describe this old bat. She was more of a feisty warhorse. Anyway, while she’s in a daze, the slot machine hits pay dirt. Bells, whistles, sirens, and strobe lights all start blaring at once. I bet everyone in the joint had themselves a gander.” Sara said.

“That’s exactly what concerns me.” Jon said.

“You’re worrying too much. I made sure that I didn’t move an inch. I just sat there in catatonic fashion facing the machine. I knew your clone would be looking at some point. All he would get to see is my backside masked in hair.” Sara rebutted.

“You mean to tell me you just sat there. How long?” Jon queried.

“As long as the sirens and bells were going off. It was a longish time. I just sat there knowing I couldn’t turn my head.” Sara responded.

“But wait a minute. Something is wrong. While the alarm was going off, I distinctly remember a casino employee congratulating the winner. Wouldn’t my clone have gotten a good look at you then?” Jon related. Sara let out a sinister smile. She was gearing up to tell the rest of the story.

“As I said, I sat on the winner’s stool staring straight ahead. Meanwhile, when the old lady eyes the jackpot, she is royally pissed. If the jackpot hadn’t hit, she probably would have swore at me and then moved on. Instead, that witch starts bombarding me with an arsenal of meaningless foul-mouthed curses. Then she menaces me with her cane as if to press her point. She asserts that the jackpot was hers to win and that I stole it. And she just kept at it. I put up with the old cow’s guff for a solid two minutes all the while not moving or responding. The bells were ringing in my ear. I was trying to use the time to think of how I should act when the casino manager came over. But the scene didn’t play out the way I expected. The manager sees the one eyed woman flailing about and myself motionless on the stool. He wrongly assumes the old lady had won. I’m trapped in my seat while the sirens are going off. There’s not much I can do. The manager shakes the old lady’s hand and congratulates her. I must say it was the longest wait I’ve had in my life. I knew your clone would be moving on once the sirens stopped.” Sara said. Jon’s concerns abated.

“Perhaps my fears are unfounded. You should be okay if you waited until the bells stopped. But I must say this was all high risk. So how did you end up with the car? I take it you corrected the manager’s little mistake.” Jon inquired.

“Corrected isn’t the word. His little mistake took fifteen minutes and a threat to get the gaming commission involved to rectify.” Sara shot back. Jon smiled. There’s more to this story than meets the eye.

“That sounds like another good story. I want to hear it.” Jon said.

“When all the noise ended, I calmly made it known to the manager that it was I who had hit the jackpot. Wouldn’t you know it, the old woman starts in on another tirade. She starts in by saying that she won the car and that I was a claim jumper. Well I didn’t expect this. I’m sitting in the winner’s seat not her. How she could make her claim stick was beyond me. The witch even calls me a modern day brigand. Frankly, she stole my line. Her one eye and wood cane more aptly fitted the description of a pirate than I. This catfight goes on for a few minutes. The casino manager doesn’t know what to think. Finally he shouts for silence. All arguments are put on hold. The manager stares long and hard at each of us, presumably to ferret out the liar. Finally, he makes his decision. Turning to me, he tells me in no uncertain terms to beat it. The manager even makes a call to security to enforce that edict. I am in complete shock. I can see a sinister grin form on the witch woman’s face. I never could understand why the manager took the old bat’s word over mine. Older people may be wiser, but they are sure not any more honest.” Sara related. Jon could no longer control his laughter. He chuckled openly. It became comical to think that Sara could seemingly execute her complex plan flawlessly only to be thwarted in the end by a scamming old lady. Jon held back most of the bubbling levity bursting to spew forth.

“Well, I know you got the car. How did you manage that?” Jon asked.

“You forget where you are. Casino’s have the all-seeing eyes in the sky.” Sara responded. Prior to renewing her tale, she adjusted her position in the seat.

“So now my argument is with the manager. I’m going ballistic at this point. Every word I say is just bouncing off the man’s suit of

armor. He just stood there in mute silence tuning out my every word. That is, until I hit upon the magic words.” Sara said.

Jon could not resist Sara leading cue. He slowly queried the next question.

“And what were the magic words to melt the manager’s hardened heart?” Jon asked.

Sara responded, “Gaming Commission. I told the manager I would get those people involved to subpoena the casino’s security tapes of this event. When I was proved right, not only would the place be slapped silly with fines, but also I’d see that the commission pulls the casino’s license to operate. It got the manager’s attention. That little tidbit of information unnerved him. He became visually unsure of himself. So as two beefy security guards are coming over to take me away, the manager momentarily relents. He tells the two young bucks to hold fast and wait. The manager wanted to make sure of the ground he stood on before proceeding. If he blew this call, his cushy job would be put at risk. So the manager asks the people upstairs to review the security tapes. Now the three-footed scam lady starts to yell at the manager again. The manager, totally impervious to events around him, is smartly waiting on the people upstairs to examine the tape. A minute later, a big change overtakes his face. He looks towards me. I see a combination of puzzlement and a ‘whoops I goofed’ facial expression written all over his mug. I didn’t have to hear what the back office was saying to him. I knew that he knew the truth. Cameras never lie, only people do. After that, things went as smooth as silk.” Sara continued. Jon was relishing every word of Sara’s plight. As a non-interested party, this whole affair seemed comical in nature. He wanted to hear more but he could see that Sara’s story was nearing an end. Jon decided to cut in.

“So what happened to Lady One Eye? How’d she take the news?” Jon asked.

“Oh god, she went off the deep end. I think she’s senile. What a tirade she gave. Rants, raves, and a collection of swear words the likes of which I never knew existed. She was like a featherless plucked chicken. After admitting his mistake, the manager at first tried to be polite to everyone involved. But the old woman went on the warpath.

In her utter frustration, the one eyed woman forcefully swung her cane striking the manager's shin. Enough was enough. The young security guards put an immediate stop to this scrappy female's outrageous behavior. The last I seen of her, they were hauling her off someplace to chill out." Sara responded.

"I guess you had an interesting day, but what took so long?" Jon asked.

"Paperwork and promotions. With a lawyer present, I had to sign my name to at least ten different papers. To each one, the lawyer explained to me what I was signing. You know, it was the standard stuff. Owner's papers, temporary license plates, state and federal tax reporting W4 forms. The casino also wanted pictures for a promotional poster of all the auto winners. You know the deal. They print your picture with a small caption of your name and hometown. I wouldn't expect it to circulate beyond the walls of this establishment." Sara replied.

"So where is the car now?" Jon queried.

"The car is completely paid for in full and road ready. Right now the casino valet service is topping off the tank with gas and checking of the oil. It should be parked out front and ready to roll in fifteen minutes." Sara beamed.

"You do realize that we will have to put the car into storage somewhere for the next five years. We can't return with a car in our hip pocket. Have you given any thought to that?" Jon mentioned. Sara became slightly annoyed.

"Of course I have. All we need do is drive the car to Chicago and place it into long-term parking. I don't mind the fact that the car will be five years older after we return. The car's make and model will only be more highly prized with age. There's no need to return from our vacation right this minute. We also have all the time in the world. I also am just dying to take the car for a spin. And there's no time like the present." Sara responded.

There was truth in what Sara said. It didn't matter how much time they spend in the past because they would always return to the same point in time they started from. An extra day or two to drive to Chicago was no big deal. Jon realized that a change of plans was in

order. Sara's story abated his initial worries concerning his clone. While not certain, he didn't think a future problem would be manifesting itself out of this issue.

"Well let's go take a gander at this car of yours. I've got to see if it's all you say it is." Jon said. Like a beaming schoolgirl with a prized object to illustrate, Sara popped out of her chair. Jon slowly rose. He grabbed the small luggage bag with his right hand. He took Sara's extended hand and asked her to lead the way. Sara didn't hesitate. She set a hurried walking pace, almost prancing. Jon did his best to follow. The two headed outside

Once the two exited the exterior glass doors, warm tropical air greeted their nostrils. The distinctive smell of rotting saltwater algae filled the air. A ten-foot covered overhanging walkway led from the door to a semi circular driveway. The driveway connected to a secondary street that ran parallel to the seashore. Guests could be dropped off and valet parking was available. At this time, a black limousine was parked out front. While a middle-aged couple stood by, the driver was unpacking a trunk stuffed with numerous travel bags. Two hotel porters rushed by Jon and Sara. They carried steel wheeled dollies meant to handle the guest's baggage. Sara looked about. Next to the public street, on the far right of the driveway, she immediately saw her car. The top of the convertible was down. She could see one young attendant quickly buffing various points along the exterior body. Practically taking Jon in tow, Sara headed directly for her car.

Sara scrambled into the driver's seat discarding her hat and wig into the back seat. Her naturally brown shoulder length hair fluttered in the light breeze. Jon attended to the gratuity. He thanked the attendant for his efforts giving the young helper a generous ten spot tip. Jon threw his small bag into the back seat. He entered the car sitting in the front passenger side. After finishing the adjustments of the seat and the mirrors, Sara started the engine. Vroom. The engine came to life, purring with the strength of a tiger ready to pounce on prey. The custom dual exhaust only enhanced that feeling.

Jon mentioned to Sara, "Chicago is over 800 miles away. We will have to take turns driving to get there. We'll have ..." Sara didn't let him finish his sentence. She goosed the throttle. Screeching tires of

rubber biting the road could be heard. The noise of the high performance engine whined in intensity as it transferred increasing power to the wheels. The car shot off like a bat out of hell. Jon became pinned in his seat. Ordinarily, Jon does not usually buckle a seat belt when driving, but he clearly saw the need to do so now. Jon quickly buckled up. And so in dramatic fashion, Sara and Jon began their road trip back to Chicago.

At the sound of the squealing tires, a bystander, who was aimlessly walking along the boardwalk, looked up. The clone of Jon watched as Sara left with a duplicate version of Jon speeding off in a red convertible. His heart sank at the undeniable realization. He was really a clone of time. Jon's clone knew all too well what that meant. Several hours earlier, the clone of Jon had indeed walked out of the casino onto the boardwalk. He started the memorization process for remembering the winning Keno numbers. Something unseen nagged at him causing a distraction from his endeavors. It was something that he could not put his finger on. That bothered him to no end. It was like an ant crawling over his body but impossible to find. Jon's clone walked the boardwalk in an effort to find the question that eluded him. A partial solution came when a young blond girl in a bathing suit walked by. After greeting her in the usual fashion, he turned about for a second look. He became awestruck. While the girl definitely did not have Sara's face, her body was a dead ringer for Sara's torso. The clone of Jon knew those special curves anywhere as belonging to his wife. This became the key inspirational moment. Now he knew exactly what was bugging him. While in the casino, he had recently seen a female whose backside strongly resembled Sara. The hair on this girl was notable different. He remembered that she sat on a slot machine nearby the jackpot hit by the one eyed lady. If this were Sara, there could only be one conclusion. But there was also another possibility. He could have seen Sara's double in this timeline. The clone immediately discarded that idea as being too remote. In this time frame, Sara's double would be eighteen years old. Theoretically, she would be under age and unable to enter the casino. Of course, the girl in the casino could be the very same girl he had just bumped into on the boardwalk. His doubts reigned supreme. All he had was a familiar

shape to go on, but no face. There were too many unknowns. He wanted answers.

Jon's clone spent an hour searching the casino for that unexpected something that could answer his questions. He came up dry. He returned back to the boardwalk to think. The clone felt like a juror debating a murder case based solely on slim circumstantial evidence. Jon's clone spent an indeterminate amount of time just walking along the boardwalk letting his thoughts amble along. After a while, the clone had almost decided that his mind was playing tricks on him. He had almost reached the point of admitting his mistake to himself. At this point, the distraction of the squealing tires refocused his attention. Watching Sara with the other Jon drive off definitively ended the debate. It was like a judge cracking his gavel and instantaneously rendering his verdict. The clone knew he was a double image byproduct of time travel. The Tabichron was now useless. It would only serve to erase him from existence. He didn't know exactly what to do. If he dropped in on the one man who could help him, it would pose other catastrophic problems. The professor would not know him. Sara and Jon hadn't met up with the professor until 1998. That would be at least three years from now. Without any fanfare, Jon's clone embarked on starting a new life making certain he stayed in history shadow.

Seven hours and over three hundred miles later, the two vacationers were still making steady progress. Night had fallen giving a limited view of the sparsely settled, wooded, and mountainous country of western Pennsylvania. For the first hour driving, it was truly a scare. City streets were not the ideal venue for unleashing the Mitsubishi's power. Up and down the monopoly board of Atlantic City streets Sara flew until she found the expressway out. Once on the highways, they quickly reached Philadelphia just in time for the evening rush hour. Driving most dangerously, Sara weaved and bobbed her way through the heavy traffic. Jon didn't like it. He had to be constantly reminding her to drive more responsibly. It was only after the sun had set that the thrill of driving the new vehicle ran its course. The demon possessing Sara left her. She grew weary. After

five hours of driving, a measure of boredom set in. Sara finally surrendered control of the vehicle over to Jon.

“We are nearing Pittsburgh. It should be familiar territory. I know that you are from around these parts.” Jon mentioned.

“Yes. It’s a small town just east of the city.” Sara replied.

“Perhaps we can drop in on your family or your friends. How about paying them a short visit?” Jon asked.

“That would be a really dumb idea. In this time, my double is a teenager. I’ve filled out somewhat in the five years since. How will I explain that?” Sara responded.

“Well it was only a suggestion. No need for the derogatory adjectives.” Jon said.

Sara settled back to a comfortable position in the passenger seat. Her thoughts concerning her family lingered on. She recalled the both happy and sad events occurring while she grew up. Then Sara’s face drew pale and blank with an eerie transfixing stare. This hypnotic gazing did not go unnoticed by Jon. He drew concerned. This farsighted look was very unusual for Sara.

“Sara! Sara! What wrong” Jon barked breaking Sara’s riveting spell. Sara settled uneasily in her seat. She needed a second or two to organize her thoughts.

“I’m sorry. I’m just recalling some bad memories.” Sara said.

“You never acted like this before. Look at you. It’s like you have seen a ghost. What has put you in another world?” Jon mentioned.

“I’ve just realized what tomorrow’s date will be. My father is going to die.” Sara responded. Jon’s recollected. He began to understand why Sara had retreated into herself. Unwittingly, Jon had chosen the time of their vacation to be very near the most painful period of Sara’s life. Fate too intervened. Sara’s irrational desire to possess the car has put her very near the time and place of that fatal event. Her father’s death was a key factor in both Sara’s and Jon’s life as well. It was one of the main reasons why the two bonded. Each lost family members as their common thread. Jon throttled back the engine, reducing his speed to a moderate fifty-five. He set the cruise control on. Now he could focus his attention to the subject at hand. Jon knew

Sara's father died in a traffic accident. Typical of Jon, his first thoughts on a matter were not his best.

"We can change that if you want. I know that he dies in a high-speed traffic accident. All we will have to do is sabotage his vehicle. He'll take an extra five minutes figuring out what we did and the accident won't happen." Jon offered. Sara strongly rejected this idea. It diametrically opposed her inherent moral principles.

"No! Absolutely not. Do not think that I am changing my ways because I wanted this car. Wrong! Material goods are one thing. People's lives are another. I am totally against using the time machine to change people's lives. However good it may appear to be, bad unforeseen events always crop up. Time travel should never be used to alter people's lives." Sara asserted.

"Oh. I think you are being overly dramatic. Time travel is nothing more than computer science. Input goes in, output comes out. You make it sound like a supernatural boogey man is out there playing havoc with the universe." Jon rebutted. While Sara became outwardly angry at the use of Jon's analogy, in the back of her mind she was indeed superstitious. She did believe in supernatural forces. Changing the past alters the present, but a payment is always extracted in the future. Sara greatly feared the ripple effects of changing a single person's life. She maintained this view even though it pertained to someone close to her. Sara opted to defend her position.

Sara explained, "You think time travel is a simple computer. Let me remind you of a few facts. Let's take the time traveling professor for example. All we know is that he innocently interacted with his mother. Exactly what he did is a mystery, but we know what the end result was. Our alternate universe came into being. The professor rewrote himself into non-existence. In our alternate world, while it may seem to be a good thing that world wars did not take place, look at the final result. Our nation became a second rate non nuclear power that was colliding headfirst into a modern day nuclear war. One unknown act led to all this. Compute that if you can." Jon turned his head as if to rebut, but Sara was not finished.

She vented, "And now look at you. You are the poster boy of the very problem of time travel. Back in time, you innocently take a fall to

which your mother happens to see as a bystander. She has a fateful premonition, acts on it, and escapes a predestined death. But to what effect? The time traveling thief from our future appears. He wrecks havoc on history itself. We were extremely lucky to figure out what caused his appearance. Reversing your father's death erased the bigger threat." Sara paused momentarily to recollect her thoughts. She still had more to say.

Sara continued, "Now what did you buy for your efforts? Only more pain from what I can see. While you changed your parent's fatal fates, only your double in this timeline truly benefits. Your alternate reality origins keep you apart. I know it hurts you so. Yes, life is different now, but I don't think it is any better. Besides, you are a man. You can deal with this alternate reality problem differently. I am a woman. My family would be just as much a part of my life as you are to me. Having to stay away from them would be totally unacceptable. Is that what you are offering to me?"

"No, of course not when you put it that way. I guess you made your point very well." Jon replied.

"As strange and painfully it is for me to say, I don't want to do anything to interfere with my father's death. I survived his death once. I can do so again." Sara bravely said.

The high beams illuminated the two-lane highway slicing through the Pennsylvanian countryside. The time was approaching ten o'clock. Traffic was light. A few other cars shared the road along with the occasional big rig trucker. The roadway traversed the spine of the Appalachian Mountains. As such, like an inverted snake, the thoroughfare climbed up one hill only to descend down into the next valley beyond. Jon could hear the cruise control labor to maintain a constant speed. Engine power increased on each incline with frequent braking occurring on the downgrades. Jon would be glad when they finally would get out of the mountains. A bathroom call was in order and he could use a hot meal. Jon had not eaten all day. He had expected to dine at a fine restaurant when he offered Sara a luncheon date. His stomach growled with each monotonous mile he metered. Sara had withdrawn into herself with her negative thoughts. Jon

thought it best to just let her be. There was nothing he could do about it. That was something that Sara had to deal with herself.

The vehicle reached the crest of another one of the many small hills. In the far distance, Jon saw the city lights emanating from a valley below. He felt like Columbus sighting land. The road meandered down a long straight and steady downgrade. Jon turned on the radio. He tuned the radio into a station offering sports talk. Local football fanatics were calling in to put their two cents worth of information concerning the upcoming home game at Three River's Stadium. Always sporting a strong team, the Steeler fans optimistically charted their team's path to the Super Bowl.

As Jon listened to the radio, suddenly multiple blasts from a trucker's air horn interrupted the relative quiet. On his left side, he suddenly became aware of a rapidly moving semi tractor-trailer. The trucker quickly overtook the red convertible going at least thirty mph faster than Jon. The mural of a hockey skater graced the trailer's sides. Bold letters in the caption read, 'Au Canada'. In addition, Jon identified the trucking company as "Trois Rivieres Trucking, Quebec." Jon thought the trucker was doing a dangerous speed in light of the mountainous terrain they were in. He wondered out loud, "What's your hurry?" It took a few seconds for Jon to realize that the big rig was in trouble. As the truck accelerated down the mountain, Jon saw the truck's brake lights glow. He knew the truck had a problem. By this time, the semi must have been going upwards towards ninety miles per hour. Jon prodded Sara. She broke her morose thoughts and gave her undivided attention to Jon.

"See that truck ahead of us. It's a runaway. I've got a bad feeling about this." Jon said. Sara didn't recognize the term runaway as it related to the truck.

"I don't understand. What do you mean runaway?" Sara quizzed.

"The throttles on diesel engines sometimes stick wide open. When they do, they race uncontrollably. No even cutting off the fuel will help. The engine will suck up and burn the motor oil in the engine." Jon answered.

"What will happen?" Sara wondered out loud.

“If the driver can’t get the situation under control, either the engine will blow up or the truck will race nonstop. Sooner or later that semi will lose control on these mountain roads. It’ll eventually crash.” Jon responded.

Taking his car off the cruise control, Jon sped up significantly to keep an eye on the big rig that was still pulling away. Posted signs along the roadbed warned of a steep downgrade for next three miles. The roadway bent slightly left. The truck was now rapidly approaching a slower moving black subcompact driving in the high-speed lane. The big rig attempted to pass. Jon and Sara could only watch as the feared accident unfolded

The heavy cargo in the trailer shifted. The rear wheels slipped and the truck jackknifed at full speed. The fully loaded trailer swatted the relatively small black car as if it were a fly. The law of momentum took over. The black sedan instantly leaped into the air as a bullfrog leaps for a fly. The bumped airborne car flew in a very controlled fashion akin to a daredevil motorcyclist gracefully jumping over a line of cars. The sedan cleared the left guardrail, the median strip and made a perfect four-point landing in the eastbound travel lane. After striking the car, the tractor-trailer rig rolled over once and landed on its right side. In a flurry of sparks, the heavily laden truck began skidding on its side.

After the heart pounding flight and the ensuing miraculous landing, the driver of the black car looked back. He focused his attention on the fireworks display caused by the wrecked truck. He watched as the truck skid alongside his car in parallel. He let out an audible sigh of relief at having dodged death on this day. The driver’s optimism turned out to be a wee bit premature. Once he turned his head around and faced forward again, blinding beams of light caused him more disorientation. All he heard was a blaring horn. Too late, he realized. He was now traveling westbound in the eastbound lane. The eastbound driver driving a Ford Taurus was equally blind from the black car’s headlights. It was all over in a matter of a few seconds. A head on collision occurred with both cars traveling in excess of sixty miles per hour. Total carnage resulted. Each of the colliding autos exploded in a shower of fire, broken glass, and twisted metal. Jon

slowed his vehicle down, shut off the radio, and took note of the time. It was five minutes after ten.

Jon said, "I'm pulling over. Someone may need our help." Sara didn't say anything. She was in too much shock at the whole tragic event. In silence, she mutually agreed to be the Good Samaritan. Jon pulled the car to a stop on the shoulder of the road behind the overturned semi. Jon and Sara rapidly exited the vehicle.

Jon ordered, "You check out the truck driver. I'll go over to the wrecked cars and see if anything can be done." Jon sprinted off, running down the highway towards the flames. Sara made her way over to the cab, now upended and lying on its side. The driver's side window now faced skyward. The Mitsubishi's burning headlights offered the only poor source of illumination.

Sara stood by the overturned cab. She was tempted to climb up the fender to get a better look inside, but she decided to call out first. Sara said, "Hello. Hello. Are you all right in there? Are you hurt? Do you need help? Please answer me." No one answered, but Sara could make out noises from someone moving about. In a few seconds, she saw two hands emerge at the window. In short order, a head popped up into view. A young man with short brown hair and high cheekbones emerged. The man spoke as if he'd just come off a roller coaster.

"Whoooo Eeeeeee. That was quite a ride. Henri Lapois is my name, but CBers call me Jinx. How do you do madam?" he said. Sara ignored his courteous question.

"Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?" Sara asked.

"Let me check. Two arms, two legs, and two feet. Yup. It looks like I'm all here. I'm haven't lost anything and I am not the worse for wear. Thanks for asking and I'll thank God for my lucky charm." The man merrily responded. Henri's remarkably chipper attitude changed when he caught sight of the carnage strewn about. He saw the catastrophic automobile wreckage fifty yards distant. He realized that he was to blame.

"Mon Dei!" he exclaimed. In a more somber fashion, Henri said, "I'm okay. I'm not even scratched. I can get out of here by myself. Let me put in a call to the state police over my CB. They will send an ambulance. Please go over and see what can be done for the others."

With that said Henri released his hold on the window frame and dropped back down inside the cab.

Meanwhile Jon had made it over to the crash site. The first car he inspected, the black Honda Civic, suffered massive damage. The complete front half of the car had disintegrated upon impact. All that remained was the rear passenger section supported on flatten wheels. The other half of the vehicle was in little bits and pieces strewn over the highway. The gas tank had ruptured in several spots. Gasoline fumes filled the air. Jon saw the bloody remains of the driver. Unfortunately for him, the impact sent the engine into his lap. The middle-aged man was still buckled into his seat but now his seat rested in the back seat area. Jon checked the man's neck for a pulse. As he expected, he found none. Nothing more could be done for him. Jon headed over to the white Ford Taurus.

The larger American built car had fared more favorably in the impact. The car's greater mass provided the occupant with more protection from the collision. The front end was utterly shredded, but the most severe damage stayed in front of the firewall. The driver's compartment stayed more or less intact. The car's frame was bent and shattered glass littered the area. Both the driver and passenger side doors had sprung open. A deployed airbag gave rise to some hope. Jon could make out the still buckled up driver. He was a middle age man of forty-five that had a badly bloodied scraped face. Upon closer inspection, Jon could see a wound on his forehead. Blood oozed from out of the man's mouth indicating he had internal injuries. But more importantly, Jon detected a sign of life. Slowly the man's head stirred. He let out a groan.

In the dim light of small gasoline fueled fires, Jon bent back the driver's door. The steering wheel assembly and the entire front dash had collapsed inward like an accordion. The wreckage had partially crushed the man's legs. Small individual sharp objects were imbedded in the man's legs. Steadily dripping blood formed a small pool at the man's feet. Jon knew that unless a tourniquet was put in place, the injured man would bleed out. Applying first aid while the man was still in the car proved impossible. It became imperative to extract the man. Jon unbuckled his seatbelt. Several times Jon attempted to pull

the man out, but to no avail. The man's legs were pinned by the collapsed dash. He wouldn't budge. Frustration set in. A new plan was in order. Jon went into think mode. Footsteps alerted Jon that another person was about. He looked back and saw Sara coming towards him. An idea formed in his brain. Jon looked about the roadway for debris with the right shape. The flattened front bumper of the Civic fit the bill nicely.

"Sara. Come quick. I need you." Jon called. In few moments, Sara reached Jon.

"The trucker is okay. How can I help?" Sara said.

"The man's legs are pinned in the debris. He'll die if we don't get him out. I'll try prying the mess off him, but I need you to pull him out." Jon replied.

"Let's do it." Sara affirmed. Jon walked to the passenger side of the vehicle carrying his makeshift pry bar. Sara drew closer to the man in preparation of pulling him out. In the dim light, she got a good look at the man's face. Sara went into immediate shock. She recognized the man. It was none other than her father. She froze as solid as an icicle. Jon could not help but note her odd behavior.

"What's wrong?" Jon queried.

"That's my father! This shouldn't be happening. This should happen tomorrow. I don't understand." Sara responded.

"Well it did happen. What does it matter? Do you want him to die?" Jon queried. Jon had asked the right question. It exposed the crux of Sara's dilemma. Sara couldn't give Jon an immediate answer. Her steadfast morals concerning time travel collided head on with her strong personal love of her father. Earlier, it proved easy to tell Jon not to sabotage her father's car thereby changing history. But, now, with the fatal event in her lap, it seemed like a double-barreled shotgun pointing straight in her face. Standing idly by and watching her father die proved much more painful than simply being told of his death after the fact. Sara's thoughts raced. She couldn't bring herself to vocalize the answer either way. She remained without decision and mute. In his delirium, Frank Underwood stirred upon recognizing his daughter's familiar voice.

“Sara, my Sara, is that you?” Mr. Underwood said speaking weakly.

“Yes, Pop. Don’t talk. You are hurt bad.” Sara responded.

Her father said in a dying voice, “I will always love you. I will always be there for you.” Mr. Underwood could say no more. He drifted off into unconsciousness.

Heart choking emotion welled in Sara upon hearing her father’s words. She was virtually in tears. It didn’t matter that this version of Frank Underwood wasn’t her actual father or that she was a duplicate from an alternate reality. All distinction became lost in seeing her father’s recognizable face again. Fate and the time machine had given her the option to make amends. If she adhered to her principals, she now had the chance to personally say her goodbyes. Alternately, the seeds of change could be sown and the unknown harvest reaped. Emotion drove her decision. Sara could not live with herself if she allowed her father to die. She chose the latter.

Barking orders to Jon, Sara acted as the commander. The two worked a team. Jon placed the improvised tool through the shattered passenger’s side window and under the debris that was once the dash. Using the pry bar as a lever, Jon used his weight to lift up on the wreckage. Sara wrapped her two arms around her father’s midsection, and then tugged hard. On her second attempt, the unconscious man popped free. Jon came over and helped Sara drag her father into a clear area five feet away. Jon indicated to Sara the immediate problem was extensive bleeding to the injured man’s legs. Taking the shirt off his back, Jon shredded it into long strips. Sara quickly searched the debris. She located a short six-inch long metal rod. With the two items together, a jury-rigged tourniquet was formed. Sara applied the first aid device. She carefully placed the cloth under her father’s calf. Using the rod, she twisted the cloth hard enough to stop the bleeding. Occasionally, Sara would release the tension for ten seconds to allow for some circulation within the leg to occur. She sat on the ground managing her father’s care.

In less than ten minutes, a number of osculating blue lights announced the arrival of the state police. Henri Lapois’s radio call had gotten through. The uniformed officers triaged the crash site for

immediate need. Warning flares were set up. The ambulance arrived shortly and two paramedics relieved Sara of her managing care duties. A quick inspection by the medical staff determined that Frank Underwood's wounds were life threatening. Quickly loading the human cargo for transport, the ambulance was soon off. Jon noted the hospital that they were taking him to.

Jon and Sara went back to their car. Jon got out a spare shirt from his luggage bag and put it on. Following a short period where the police took statements from the three eyewitnesses, Jon and Sara decided to leave for the hospital. While driving, Sara noted that the time was ten minutes to midnight. Again, she became perplexed.

"I don't understand any of this. My father's death happened in an accident that was supposed to happen tomorrow. History did not repeat itself. Why not? Why did this accident happen today?" Sara asked. Jon quizzed Sara on the specifics of her real father's death.

"Weren't you at the university at the time when they informed you? What exactly did they tell you?" Jon asked.

"The call came from the Pennsylvania State Police at about eleven o'clock in the morning. They mentioned my father was involved in a fatal head on traffic accident. I was so distraught. I never did follow up on the specifics." Sara responded. Jon realized the obvious truth.

"Sara, nothing is different. This was the accident he was involved in. And it is also true that he would have died tomorrow. You wrongly assumed that his fatal accident occurred on the same day that he died. Not true. Your real father's death was not instantaneous. He must have lingered on and clung to life." Jon mentioned. Sara, now totally in tears, broke down upon realizing the horrible suffering her real father had endured prior to his death. Jon offered his thoughts and even a ray of hope.

He said, "I don't know if we altered events tonight or not. He's got multiple injuries. But in the fifteen minutes he was in our care before the ambulance came, we did check his bleeding. That's a big plus. He now has a slim chance at life."

Upon reaching the hospital, Jon and Sara checked in with the hospital staff on Mr. Underwood's status. As a little white lie, Jon mentioned to the receptionist that Sara was Mr. Underwood's niece.

The on duty nurse instructed them to have a seat in the emergency room waiting area. Jon surmised that it was going to be a very long wait. He braced himself. Somewhere in the wee hours of the morn, an exhausted Sara fell fast asleep slouched in a chair. Unaware of the hospital activity occurring around him, Jon rested his eyes and drowsed. Before long, he too became sound asleep.

At midmorning the next day, Sara awoke on the call of her name. A young doctor, dressed in the standard issue white smock stood before her. When Sara became fully cognizant, the doctor spoke directly to her.

“I’m Dr. Harte. I understand you are Mr. Underwood’s niece. I want to give you an update on his condition.” the doctor said. The doctor paused a moment giving Sara time enough to shake off the cobwebs of sleep. She now had his full attention.

“He’s out of critical care. It was very touch and go last night. His heart stopped once and we had to use the defibrillator. He had lost a lot of blood. Internally, he has a ruptured spleen with a section of his liver being badly damaged. A puncture wound in his leg severed an artery. In total, we spent six hours in surgery working on him. I’m glad to tell you that he tolerated the procedures well. He is a lot more stable today and we have downgraded his condition to intensive care. I think he’ll survive. Mr. Underwood also has three broken ribs, separate fractures in both the tibia bones of his legs, and one of his ankles is shattered. I would expect that he would need to walk with the use of a cane for the rest of his life.” Dr. Harte continued. A grateful Sara thanked the doctor for his report. In the back of her mind, the good news was bittersweet. She just knew that Frank Underwood’s new life would have to be paid for in the unwritten future. What exactly that payment would be was uncertain.

The remainder of the trip back to Chicago proved uneventful. After nine hours on the road with numerous pit stops for food and fuel, the Mitsubishi rolled into the windy city. The evening sun has long since set and the witching hour was approaching. Jon was exhausted. Sara wanted nothing more than to sleep in her own bed. To that end, a minor problem developed. In arriving at such an odd hour, the parking garages were not staffed with managers. Only common nighttime toll

takers were present. These workers did not have the power to write up a long-term contract for storage. The two time travelers could not just leave the car in any garage without it being properly cared for. A car parked for the seeming indefinite period of five years would appear to be abandoned. Faced with the prospect of extending their vacation another night, they kept searching the various parking garages. In the third garage they tried, they did find a manager present. He was a short balding Scotsman, fifty-five years of age or so, who looked like a pit bull on steroids.

When Jon mentioned his wished to store the vehicle for a little more than five years, the manager balked. Their long-term storage policy allowed for a period of no more than one year. Jon knew that money talks and it could bend the company's policy. A period of negotiation followed with Jon doing some fancy talking. When Jon offered five thousand dollars upfront, the manager's position began to melt. The manager saw that Jon was serious but the manager rightly assumed that Jon would pay more. The manager counter offered. He asked for ten thousand dollars, in cash all upfront. Jon was totally agreeable to the dollar amount, but he felt a little used. Jon wanted the seal the deal, but he also wanted to get a little more for his money. Jon figured that in shelling out that kind of money, he should be entitled to a lifetime contract. So Jon revised his terms and made the new offer. The manager was flabbergasted. He quickly weighed the prospect of earning ten thousand dollars cash at the cost of some undefined additional years. Exactly how long a car could be valuable, he reasoned. Whether the car was stored five years or twenty-five years, it did not matter. Nobody needs to store a car for a lifetime. It makes no sense. Seeing a sucker, the manager quickly agreed. As the paperwork was being drawn up, the manager relapsed into uncertainty on the issue of how Jon would pay. The manager wanted his cash up front. Jon calmed his fears. Drawing a Platinum MasterCard with access to the previously won casino money, Jon swiped his card. The large transaction went through. The manager's face glowed with satisfaction. Henceforth, the manager became as helpful as he could possibly be.

The parking garage they chose was built with three stories above ground and five levels underground. The manager instructed Jon to park the vehicle on the lowest level. The dungeon, as the manager referred to it, was the reserved area for long-term storage of vehicles. Both Jon and Sara heartily shook the manager's hand. Jon drove the red convertible down into the bowels of the building.

The dungeon was aptly named. A hodgepodge of sparsely parked autos barely filled an eighth of the room. Heavy layers of dust coated most of the car's hoods. Sara passed a fallout shelter sign signifying the dual use of this concrete structure. In case of nuclear war, this lowest level could double as a certified bomb shelter. Jon had his pick of available spaces. He found a space along one of the walls with no adjacent cars about and parked the car facing out. Sara placed the bold numbered tag identifying the vehicle under the windshield. Into the glove compartment, Sara placed her copy of the written contract. Jon had acquired a magnetic hide-a-key box in one of the many rest stops he frequented. He got it just for this purpose. Placing the ignition keys in the box, he placed the box into the engine compartment a hand's length under the front fender. Jon removed his bag of luggage from the car, but left Sara's wig and hat behind. Sara and Jon both closed and locked their respective doors. All was ready.

"Won't the manager get suspicious or alarmed when he doesn't see us exit the building?" Sara asked.

"No, I don't think so. He's probably too busy counting his money to notice. He'll just think he somehow missed us." Jon replied.

Jon extracted the Tabichron device from out of its case. He passed the suitcase over to Sara and instructed her to hold his hand. In one-handed fashion, Jon held the Tabichron in his left hand. He pressed the central button using his thumb. Poof. Jon and Sara ceased to exist like they never were there. A white spandex bra, size thirty-four and cup size C, fluttered down onto the concrete floor. As an object of this time period, the item of lingerie stayed with the time period.



Time travelers should never alter the past. When Sara's desires got the best of her, the time explorer's small act set in motion a chain of unwanted events. After a time experiment goes awry, clues left in the past become Sara's only salvation. A race to decode the clues ensues with a revenge minded biker gang giving her chase. Ultimately, Sara's deliverance may rest with those events she once set in motion.

Hope in the Dark Horizons

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