

Killing Time – The Third Rose

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“It worked! It worked!” exclaimed Steph. “All of this work these past few years, and we finally did it!”

“Yes! Congratulations to us!” said Robert, her lab mate.

“Call *The Times*, *Sixty Minutes*! CNN!” she said.

“Ha, very funny! It will be our little secret, at least for a while,” he said.

“Yeah, I know! But a girl can dream, can’t she?” she said.

“Dream? This whole project is like a dream. Hidden deep inside the military, with only a handful of people aware of what we’re doing. Unlimited funds, this lab...” he said.

“I know, just look at this place,” she said.

The lab was filled with equipment from wall to wall, floor to ceiling. The world’s most advanced computers, numerous monitors displaying all types of formulas and data, charts and graphs that were continually updating.

Steph Evans was still giddy. She was in her mid-thirties about five ten, with brown eyes and brown hair pulled back in a ponytail. She was wearing a blue lab coat, jeans and sneakers.

Robert was a few years younger, rail thin, and at about six feet tall, he looked even thinner. He wore large black rimmed glasses over his blue eyes. He wore a Phillies hat and had wavy dark blond hair sticking out on the sides.

The monkey began to screech and jumped into Steph’s arms. “Hiya Captain Kirk! You’re going to be the most famous monkey that ever lived, even bigger than King Kong! Because you’ve *boldly gone where no monkey has gone before!*”

“Ya know, when we first started this, I thought that time travel just wasn’t possible. Even after reading your paper, which made sense, I just thought it was a pipe dream, but you did it,” said Robert.

“We did it! Both of us! This could change history!” she exclaimed.

“I ... I know, and I’m not too sure I approve ...” said Robert shyly.

“Our job is the science, leave the philosophy to the philosophers,” she said.

“Yes, but ... this is a military project, designed only to get a military advantage ... you can’t just change things, there are consequences!” he added.

“Give it a rest. What if we could have eliminated Hitler before he invaded Poland? Or John Wilkes Booth, or Charlie Manson? Think of the lives that could have been saved!” she said.

“Yes, but one action leads to another! My grandfather met his soulmate as a result of the war!” he said.

“If they were soulmates, then your grandparents would probably have met in another way!” responded Steph as her cell phone began to ring. She put Captain Kirk into his cage and answered.

“Hi Cindy! ... Great ... I wish I could tell you how great! ... yes, I’ll be there at five o’clock. Thanks for the reminder!” She ended the call and turned to Robert, “My fitting is tonight. She will be such a beautiful bride! And even more special to have a wedding in the Christmas season. The greens and reds will be so photogenic!”

“You’re the Maid of Honor, right?” he asked.

“Yep! Can’t wait! My dad is beside himself!” she replied.

“I’m sure he’s proud, as he should be. So, does he wheel himself down the aisle in the chair or does someone push him?” asked Robert, trying not to pry.

“Well, my sister wants her mom’s brother to push him, but Dad is a proud guy, so he wants to wheel himself,” Steph said.

“So, how did he end up in the wheelchair? If you don’t mind me asking,” said Robert.

“No, not at all. I was really young, and it was a bad year for us. My mom was killed in a car accident about six months before,” she said.

“How awful, I’m so sorry!” said Robert.

“Thanks. Anyway, my dad’s actually a hero. He was a Philly policeman and his unit responded to a robbery in progress at a crowded store. He was the first one in, and a crazy junkie was waving a gun around and shooting randomly. Dad quickly drew on him and they fired at the same time. Dad was hit and the bullet lodged in his spine. His shot killed the junkie. Luckily, no one else was hurt. He got a commendation from the mayor for valor,” she said as she teared up.

“Wow, he really *is* a hero!” said Robert.

“I’d give anything to have him walk at the wedding, but it could be worse I guess,” she said.

“So, now that we can go back in time,” Robert said changing the subject, “where would you like to go, and who would you like to see?”

“Wow, that’s a great question! Geez, I dunno! Maybe see The Beatles at The Cavern Club, or the signing of the Declaration of Independence! The possibilities are endless!” she said. “What about you?”

I think I’d like to sit down with H. G. Wells and give him a few pointers as he was writing *The Time Machine*, I think I could help him!” he joked.

“I’ll bet you could!” she said as she looked at her watch. “I’m gonna get going if I’m to make the fitting!”

“Okay, I’ll be right behind you. I want to make a few notes. I can’t wait until tomorrow! I’m sure I won’t be able to sleep. Exciting times! Hug your sister for me,” said Robert.

Steph met her sister Cindy, actually her step-sister, if you want to get technical about it, but they never do. Cindy was a little shorter than Steph, with long flowing dark hair and big brown eyes. She was 28 and completely focused on her wedding. She wore a tee shirt and shorts, but soon she was in her wedding dress for a final fitting.

“You are gorgeous!” said Steph as she hugged her sister.

“I agree!” added Darlene, Cindy’s mother, as she joined in the hugging. “Your dad is going to be so proud!”

Darlene was an attractive woman in her early 60s. She had shoulder length reddish hair and was wearing a smart outfit. She clutched a designer handbag, where she found some tissues to wipe a tear.

The three women grabbed a drink and a quick meal. They were very close. This wedding was something that they’ve all been looking forward to for a long time, and they were savoring every part of it, including the planning and arrangements. Cindy is a bit fanatical about Christmas, and even as a little girl she spoke of having a Christmas wedding. She was great throughout the process and involved Steph in as much of it as possible.

On the way home, Steph was obsessing over something that she said earlier. She thought that, perhaps, with some luck, she could arrange to have her Dad walk down the aisle. She ran into her house and made a beeline to her closet. She opened the box with her Glock G43 pistol and checked the clip. All loaded.

Growing up as a police officer’s daughter, she certainly was no stranger to guns. Her dad was guilty of simply knowing too much about what was out there that could hurt his family. He lived it every day, and he wanted to give his daughters every opportunity to defend themselves, if it ever came to that. So, Steph and Cindy both learned how to handle and respect guns. They took shooting lessons and stayed in practice. Steph made sure the safety was on, put the gun in her purse, quickly got to her car and headed back to the lab.

Once back in her element she turned on several power supply units which lit up all of the monitors. She removed the gun from her purse and put it in the pocket of her bulky jacket. She put the purse on the table next to the keyboard. She then started the computers and walked them through their log-on procedures.

Once everything was up and running, she made several complicated computations and entered coordinates and times into the interface. She set both the exit and retrieve times on the timer screen and stepped into the transport chamber. She wasn’t at all nervous as she watched the countdown on the screen. Five, four, three, two, one, and at zero there was a flash and she was gone!

At the same time, she appeared outside of a convenience store in the city. She looked through the window and saw a skinny kid with scruffy blond hair poking out of his dirty gray hoodie. She saw him reach into the pouch in the front and pull out a gun. He pointed it at the teenage girl behind the register and she froze with big wide eyes glued to him.

Steph entered the store and was told to get against the wall. She complied and acted scared, which she was. The girl behind the register opened it as a young couple entered the store. The woman was *very* pregnant. The robber turned to them and motioned to get against the wall as he shot into the ceiling. The young woman started screaming and the man pulled her close. The robber reached into the register and grabbed as much cash as he could with one hand.

The girl behind the register must have tripped an alarm because soon sirens were screaming out. The robber heard the sirens and started to point the gun at everyone as he began to lose his cool. A police cruiser screeched to a halt at the door of the store. The robber ran to the back of the

little store, probably to escape out the back door. When the door was locked, he ran back towards the front as the cops burst in. He pointed his gun at the first cop. In an instant Steph drew her gun and shot the robber. He collapsed to the ground and the startled cops pointed their guns at her as she disappeared into thin air.

At the same time, she appeared in the transport chamber. She was sweating and shaking and still gripping her gun. She took a moment and composed herself. She exited the chamber and went to the fridge in the lab and grabbed a bottle of water. She sipped it and tried to comprehend all that just happened to her. There was so much. The first-*ever* human time trip, she actually killed a man, and she spared her dad from being shot. It was going to take a bit to process all of this and to allow it all to sink in. She finished the water as she logged out of the systems and powered everything down. She went to the rest room and splashed some water on her face, then she brushed her hair.

She couldn't wait to get to her dad's house. The first thing that she noticed was that there was no wheelchair ramp leading up to the front door. A satisfied smile wiped across her face. She went to the door and he met her there.

"I thought I heard a car!" he said while he hugged her. Tom Evans was a tall man, about six foot three. His brown wavy hair is starting to go gray, but he looked to be a picture of health. She hugs him back hard, like it was the first time, which it was.

"Oh, this is the best!" she said. As they hugged she looked around the house and noticed it was very different, very manly.

"The fitting went great! Everyone is so excited about the wedding!" she exclaimed.

"Wait? Wedding? Is that your way of telling me something?" he said getting excited.

"Not me! Cindy!" she said.

From the look on his face she knew something was wrong. It hit her in waves, and she collapsed into a chair.

"Steph, are you okay? Who's Cindy?" he asked pouring her some water from a pitcher on the end table.

She raised the water to her lips and took a sip, "I ... I ... yes ... no ..." she mumbled as she was bowled over with emotion as she was rushed with thoughts. She was just a little kid, but she remembered that dad actually met Darlene during his rehab from his gun shot. They fell in love and then the next year they were married. Then Cindy was born the next year.

"Dad, I'm so sorry, I ruined everything!" she said sobbing, "I'll fix it all, I promise! I ... I gotta go back to the lab!" She quickly hugged him hard then jumped into her car and raced back to the lab.

She turned everything on and as the equipment whirled and came up to speed. She checked her Glock and slipped it into her pocket. She set the arrival time for several seconds earlier than the previous time. In her head she went over scenarios of how this could play out, and, what was the possibility of two Stephs showing up a few seconds apart. She thought about the possible disruption of the entire time/space continuum, but rationalized that the chain of events would preclude that from happening. Also, as a scientist, she was sure that since matter can't be created or destroyed, there could only be one of her at any given time, whenever the time is!

She set the countdown and stepped into the transport chamber. During those last final seconds, she prayed for forgiveness and for everything to be back to normal. In a flash she was gone and standing outside of the store.

She looked inside and saw the scruffy kid in the hoodie. Everything played out exactly as the first time. She entered, and again was told to get up against the wall. The young pregnant couple came in, a shot was fired, he grabbed the cash from the register, cops appeared, he ran to the back.

As the police burst through the door, everything happened all at once, but that split-second appeared as ultra-slow motion to Steph. As the robber came to the front, he raised his gun and pointed it at the lead officer, a tall man with brown wavy hair. Steph pulled out her gun and pointed it at the robber screaming, “NO!” as the officer turned to her and pointed his gun towards her yell.

Three shots rang out in unison. The officer fell to the ground, wounded by the robber. Steph’s shot hit robber’s head and it exploded, spraying his blood and brains on the white walls of the store. Steph was hit in the chest by the officer, and with her dying breath she whispered, “Dad.”

Since her life ended there in the store, she wasn’t around to invent the time travel system, so her return to the present never happened. She had no identification, so she was buried in the Potters Field as a Jane Doe.

The wounded officer was lauded as a hero and was given a commendation from the mayor of Philadelphia.

Thirty years later, with tears in his eyes, he wheeled himself down the aisle of St. Paul’s Cathedral to give his daughter away at her beautiful Christmas wedding.

In the wedding program, under the thanks and acknowledgements, there was a line that read, “The first red rose on the altar is in honor of the baby Jesus, born on this blessed day. The second rose is in memory of Cindy’s father’s first wife, Melissa. The third rose is for Cindy’s sister Stephanie, whom she never had the pleasure of meeting.

Thanks so much for reading this story!

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