

CounterClockWise

Chapter 01 – Arrival

It is unusually dark tonight in the parking lot of the Outside Inn. The moon is new, and the parking lot lights at the top of their stubby poles are just bright enough to destroy night vision -- the gloom beyond each little island of illumination is almost palpable.

A few crickets give voice at the edge of the darkness... somewhere in the distance a dog is barking... and even further away is the barely audible sound of a siren. The faint echoes of country music barely filter through the thick walls of the old Inn, but they are not loud enough to disrupt a feeling of isolation that shrouds the scene. Instead they amplify it.

There are quite a few vehicles in the lot -- most of them old trucks, and one truck is particularly antique. It was blue once, but that was a long time ago. Now, it is just dark in color. It has large running boards and a bed that seems too small for the size of the cab. It is parked directly under a light and is facing towards the exit of the parking lot.

The heavy wooden door opens suddenly -- spilling loud music and crowd noises into the gloom outside the Inn. Kevin Williams steps out, and the door closes behind him, restoring the nighttime quietude. He is mumbling distractedly to himself about a redhead and stumbles a little. He takes several short quick steps to catch himself.

He was tired when he got there several hours ago and the Johnny Walker Red didn't help. Now he is just plain exhausted. He moves his tall, athletic frame slowly with his head bent down and his hand in his pocket digging for his keys. He reaches the tailgate of the antique truck -- his most prized possession -- and pulls out his keys as the feeble light directly overhead flickers, pops, and goes out...

Kevin looks up, looks down shakes his head at Clotho's whim and grumbles resignedly in a low voice...

"...And the void was filled with darkness..."

He bends his head even more and raises his hand, bringing his eyes closer to his keys while trying to decide which one is for the truck... he squints as holds them up to the night sky hoping to see better from the faint starlight.

He finally finds the right key, opens the always-stubborn door and backs in to sit down until he bumps into the oversize toolbox sitting in the middle of the front

seat. The tools are always close so that he can work on the truck whenever he gets a chance. He gets the keys into the ignition and starts the truck which springs surprisingly and immediately to life. The radio is already on and loud.

Kevin steps hard on the gas while holding the brake for a second, causing the truck to spring to life and peel out of the dirt parking lot. He intentionally breaks the rear end loose and enjoys the fishtail and the flying dust before the tires regain their traction on the paved road.

He proceeds to drive several miles down the dark deserted county road while he sings loudly and off key- "You don't have to call me Darlin...Darlin..."

Suddenly a small sound comes from inside the truck ...from the other side of the large tool kit sitting on the front seat.

Kevin leans forward and looks around the tool kit – and there on the far side of the seat -- is a naked woman...well, nearly naked. Her only apparel appears to be a terry-cloth bath towel. She is apparently asleep in a fetal position with her exposed back to him and her head on the crack between the door and the seat.

Kevin does a double-take and chuckles softly to himself as he says, " I don't remember picking YOU up at the Outside Inn. Who the heck ARE you and what are you doing in my truck..."

When there is no answer, Kevin changes his tone to one of concern, "Seriously, lady, are you OK?"

But there is still no answer.

Having leaned forward to look around the toolkit at the woman, Kevin looks back to the dark road just in time.

Suddenly, a pair of way-too-bright headlights careens madly onto the road way-too-close in front of him.

Throwing the steering wheel hard over, Kevin shouts, "Holy Cosign, Batman! Where did YOU come from?"

As his own headlights briefly spotlight the interior of the other car, he catches a fleeting glimpse of a pair of large startled eyes in the face of the other driver -- a face that seems somehow familiar.

Then the other car's headlights hit him full in the face. Blinded, he continues his turn and swerves wildly into the dirt driveway that the other car is fleeing. His truck spins out-of control, across the driveway, and lands jarringly but softly in the loosely packed mud of the ditch alongside the drive.

Kevin, a bit shaken, says out loud, “Wonder what THAT guy was running from...he sure looked familiar but I don’t know anybody along this stretch of nowhere.”

The tool kit has crashed to the floor of the front seat, so there is now nothing between Kevin and the woman.

For a short time, Kevin does not move. He isn’t hurt but his shaken mind takes a while to register that fact. The other car has disappeared into the gloom by the time Kevin realizes his engine is quiet and he can hear the crickets.

Slowly realizing that his head hurt, Kevin gingerly touches his forehead, and then looks at his fingers. Apparently he is not bleeding.

He looks at the figure of the nearly naked woman in the passenger seat. She is still not awake, but she doesn’t seem hurt at all by the soft impact.

Muttering to himself, Kevin says, “Well, I’m not seriously hurt and you didn’t even wake up – guess it could have been worse.

”But how the heck am I gonna get us out of this ditch?”

Looking around and assessing his situation, He wonders what to do next...he tries the door handle but the always-stubborn door has become jammed and doesn’t budge. The windows are only partly down and when he tries to roll his window down the rest of the way – it won’t budge either.

Then without so much as a jerk, the car rises smoothly into the air, rights itself, and glides along -- and three feet above -- the dirt driveway

He thinks to himself, “This can’t be real... ..wonder what was IN that scotch.”

He leans over and shakes the woman and says,

“I’m serious...PLEASE wake up.”

The car continues its silent, eerie journey down the drive and approaches a steep hill leading toward an old mansion silhouetted against the night sky in the distance. But instead of climbing the hill, a circular tunnel, glowing an unearthly deep, violet-blue opens ahead -- leading directly into the hillside.

Eyes agape, Kevin is talking to himself out loud now, “Man! It just gets weirder and weirder.”

The car drifts into the tunnel and the opening closes behind with a definite and final-sounding "oomph". And suddenly there is total and absolute silence. Kevin can hear nothing except his heart pounding in his ears.

Imitating the tunnel closing sound, Kevin says, " 'Oomph' ? -- I have never liked the sound of 'oomph' ”.

And if it weren't already bad enough, He is suddenly frozen – paralyzed. He is unable to move even so much as an eyelid.

A strange and eerie light illuminates the interior of the tunnel, and Kevin can see patterns of shifting, fluid colors in the walls, ceiling and floor. The light seems to come from deep within the surfaces and reminds him of colors reflected off of an oil film. The car continues to glide forward and somewhat downhill through a tube like corridor that he can now see terminates in a large space with indistinct walls.

Trying to stay calm by making jokes to himself, Kevin thinks, "Well I don't like the plot so far, but at least the special effects are good..."

Arriving in the large, central space, the car stops traveling forward and starts spinning...slowly at first and then faster and faster making Kevin somewhat nauseous,

"If they knew how much I had to drink, they would know better than to make me dizzy..."

At some point, everything in the car except the girl and Kevin, start to become somehow immaterial. While he can still feel the seat and the steering wheel, the points of contact are somehow less definite. And everything -- his clothes, the car, the seats -- everything except himself and the girl are slowly becoming eerily transparent as if it is all phasing out of existence.

Kevin thinks, "Just because YOU had nothing to wear doesn't mean we have to have matching costumes."

Then he and the girl begin to disappear from the outside in. First their skins become transparent and disappear, then muscles and exposed tissues...

Somehow, Kevin can still think and he still cloaks his rising apprehension in humor. Imitating the wicked witch in his mind, he shrieks... "Help me! I'm Melting"...from the outside in."

But the process continues. Their bodies seem to be disappearing system by system...circulatory system, then nervous systems, then organs, and finally their skeletons.

Even after all else disappears, Kevin can still perceive the girl's brain and the neuronal activity within. And he suddenly wonders how he is "seeing" at all since he apparently has no eyes.

He thinks sardonically,
"Well I always wanted to know how a woman thinks... but this isn't what I had in mind!"

And just barely before total panic sets in, a reversal of the process begins. Bones become visible again followed by organs and nerves and muscles and blood vessels...followed quickly by skin. But, except for Kevin and his companion, everything else is gone. The truck, the toolkit, their clothes all fail to rematerialize.

Unfrozen and mostly reconstituted, Kevin relaxes a tiny bit as he thinks,
"OK Ladies and gentlemen, we are beginning our descent...if you will fasten your seat belts and return your seat backs to the upright position..."

Then it is suddenly over. He and his co-nudist companion are suddenly whole again and are deposited on the floor of a large room with cylindrical walls and a very high ceiling.

Kevin resumes his muttering,
" ... a strange encounter of the three-squared kind."

As he starts to rise from the resilient plastic-looking floor, he notices that the girl is awake and looking interestedly around without any indication of fear or even surprise.

He directs his comment to her,
"What, NOW you're awake Well, welcome to Mars!"

Speaking for the first time. she confusedly answers,
"Mars?"

He cannot help noticing that she is quite beautiful. She is tall and athletic and he guesses her age at thirty or so. Her silky hair is somewhat longer than shoulder length. Trim waist, nice figure, ... Realizing she is also visually assessing him, he looks down and realizes he is definitely naked. He is a bit embarrassed at her unabashed examination and quickly turns away as he covers himself with his hands...

They are approached by a man and a woman who may have appeared from nowhere, or may have come from a hidden doorway, With his attention directed at his traveling companion, Kevin failed to notice how they got into the room.

The approaching couple each carries a long white bathrobe. The man puts his around Kevin's shoulders while the woman assists Kevin's beautiful companion into hers.

Kevin recovers his tongue and says,
"Hey! The Martians look just like us."

The woman quickly leads Kevin's companion away thru a people-sized door that Kevin had not noticed in the huge wall.

The man, who easily matches Kevin's 6' 2" of height, is totally bald and has features that seem somehow familiar to Kevin as if he had met the man before. He speaks to Kevin,

"Come with me, please. We have been expecting you, Mr. Williams."

Hearing a regular, old American accent and standard English startles Kevin and shocks his tongue into action as he starts asking questions,

"Where are you taking her? Wait! Where are you taking ME?"

The man smiles good-naturedly and says,

"In TIME, Mr. Williams. All in good TIME. And you may call me Chaucer."

Not knowing what else to do, Kevin follows him through a second door on the opposite side of the room that his traveling companion had used for egress. Still using his innate humor as a defense, Kevin says,

"...and you can call me Darlin...Darlin"

The man replies,

"How about I just call you Kevin."

On the other side of the door, Kevin finds himself at the front of a steeply tiered conference room, and above him on each tier there is a single countertop that runs in a semicircle from one end of the tier to the other. And at each level sit from five to ten people so that the room holds probably 20 or 25 people – all looking at him expectantly.

Kevin sizes them up and decides that are dressed like a typical group of scientists. Some wear scrubs, some lab coats and some shorts and tee-shirts. Some are neatly groomed and some are notably scruffy. Kevin just stares back.

Once inside, Chaucer indicates for Kevin to approach a podium at the front dais as he says,

“OK, Kevin, we would like to ask you a few questions while your experience is still fresh in your MIND if you don’t MIND.”

This elicits a few chuckles and more than a few groans from the crowd. Kevin replies,

“I have a few questions of my own.”

But Chaucer insists while punning again for the crowd,

“HOURS, first. Let’s start with a simple narrative description of your journey, please.”

Not knowing what else to do, Kevin complies and begins to recount his experience,

“Well after a really intense afternoon trying to solve a fourth degree differential equation in an 11 dimension Riemannian manifold, I was at a new bar drowning my lack of success in 12-year-old scotch. I was tireder than I thought and overdid it a little.

I think I ended up lecturing some redhead about the exponential powers of ten until her eyes glazed over. “

Chaucer interrupts:

“Since we are very interested in your exact thoughts that night, could you be more specific.”

Kevin replies,

“Sure...but I wish I had a projector....I was writing on a napkin at the bar.”

A voice that seems to come from nowhere and everywhere responds to Kevin’s wish,

“Perhaps I can help, sir.”

Kevin is a little startled and asks,

“Who is that?”

It is now Chaucer who answers his question,

“That is Jeeves, a Cybernetic entity of this facility, and it has the capacity to project anything you wish. You simply need to ask.

Kevin, adjusting quickly to this new development says,

“OK...well, let’s see...I probably said something like this...

Perhaps the biggest barrier we need to overcome in making science understandable to non-scientists is the language barrier. Scientists generally speak fluent Math-ese and somewhat broken English (especially theorists). And since we generally think in the language we speak, scientists and non-scientists even think in different languages.

For example consider the Powers of Ten. . A positive exponent of the number 10 is, conveniently, the number of zeroes following the digit “1” when the number is written normally. For example...”

As Kevin speaks his thoughts out loud, Jeeves makes appropriate visual aids materialize in the air in the room. So as Kevin says

“...ten to the first equals ten and has one zero after the digit one...ten to the second equals 100 and has 2 zeroes...ten to the third...”

Jeeves creates the following chart in the air in front of the dais:

$10^1 = 10$	1 Zero
$10^2 = 100$	2 Zeroes
$10^3 = 1000$	3 Zeroes
$10^9 = 1,000,000,000$	9 Zeroes

And as Kevin continues.

“Sometimes we find it very difficult to express and appreciate the scale, both large and small, of the objects and distances that science deals with. And we certainly don’t help the matter by writing a number that contains 12 or 27 zeroes. It is much easier to say that a million-million is 10^{12} and a million-million-million-billion is 10^{27} .”

Jeeves projects

$10^{12} = 1,000,000,000,000$	12 Zeroes
$10^{27} = 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000$	27 Zeroes

Enjoying the magic, Kevin now incorporates the visual aide with his narration, “A negative exponent of the number 10 expresses the number of places following the decimal point including the “1” when the number is written in a conventional manner. For example...”

Again Kevin speaks the following out loud and Jeeves makes them materialize in the air in the room

“...ten to the minus one...ten to minus two...”

$10^{-1} = 0.1$	1 Decimal Place
$10^{-2} = 0.01$	2 Decimal Places
$10^{-3} = 0.001$	3 Decimal Places
$10^{-9} = 0.000000001$	9 Decimal Places

Kevin concludes this portion by saying,
 “Needless to say, the redhead left so I did too.

When I left the bar and got into my truck to go home, there was a beautiful, naked lady curled up on my front seat. I looked around for Allen Funt but didn’t see him.”

A man seated near the right end of the third tier raises his hand and speaks out:
 What time was that please?

Kevin replies,
 “Around 3:00 AM I think.”

For the next hour or so, Kevin proceeds with his narrative. There are many interruptions and many questions. Sometimes Kevin’s answers prompt long and involved conversation among different groups in the gathered crowd.

Often one then another of the group in the audience asks for clarification or further description or simply to express surprise or satisfaction.

Kevin endures it as long as he can before turning to Chaucer ...
 “Chaucer, how about a sidebar.”

Chaucer, clearly not understanding the reference, asks
 “What?”

Kevin continues,
 “Never mind...look, I’ve got to take a leak.”

Chaucer, smiles and points to a small door adjacent to the one they had entered through as he says,
 “ Oh, sorry. You will find the necessary facilities through the door on the right.”

Whereby Kevin makes as dignified an exit as he can manage.

When Kevin returns, most of the room has cleared and there is but a handful of men and women left. They are standing in a small group chatting and arguing over what they have just heard.

Upon seeing Kevin reappear, Chaucer signals everyone for attention and when the group had quieted down, says to Kevin,
“OK, it’s your turn. What would you like to know ?

Kevin gathers his thoughts and is surprised at his own lucidity.
“Let’s start with where we are.”

Chaucer replies,
“We are on a large estate just west of Summerdale.”

To which Kevin asks
“On what planet?”

That breaks them all up – when the laughing quiets and the final tears have been wiped from their collective eyes, Chaucer takes pity on Kevin...
“Earth, of course.

“Why don’t I give you some background so your questions are well founded.”

Kevin muttering a bit, answers.
“Thanks; I always like to ask well founded questions.”

To which Chaucer replies,
“First, you haven’t traveled a long distance to get here in the conventional sense. You are in the same location in Baldwin County in South Alabama that you were in before your experience began.

“You started Just East of Fairhope and proceeded to drive about 2.35 miles down County Road 104 toward Summerdale.

“When you were passing the driveway to this estate, you were almost hit by a car emerging from the driveway.

“The near accident caused your own vehicle to spin into the driveway where you were caught in some kind of a temporal field that precipitated you into your future – our present of course.”

Then Chaucer supplies the piece-de-resistance... the answer to the question that Kevin couldn’t know to ask...

“It is now 8:00 PM in the evening of June 2 of the year 2121.”

Kevin is clearly startled
“ 2121? The year is 2121?”

Chaucer, clearly enjoying the moment, replies,
“That is correct...2121.”

Kevin presses on.

“And who were all those people I just talked to?”

And Chaucer patiently answers,

“They are a group of scientists and meta-technologists who work for a company called “CounterClockWise”. Whose singular purpose is to build a time-machine

Surprised, Kevin says, “Really?”

And Chaucer insists it is true:

“Yes an old fashioned, new fangled, H.G Wells Time-Machine.”

Kevin, presses on, realizing the flow of information could stop at any moment:

“Who’s brainchild was that?”

Chaucer replies:

“The owner of the company maintains that he has personally experienced time-travel. He founded the company to research and build a machine.”

Kevin only half believing,

“Yesterday, I would have said he was nuts!”

Chaucer agrees somewhat.

“The staff who work here respond with everything from disbelief to hopeful acceptance – but they all have well-paying jobs because of it. So they do the work and keep their doubts to themselves (mostly).

“Our owner has been insistent that a time-traveler would arrive on this date. So we prepared to meet you upon your arrival and debrief you immediately.

“He suggested that your observations about the patterns of color in the tunnel might prove to be very valuable to our research.

“Tomorrow you are invited to join us in our work. You will be assigned to work in the RDoE department (Research and Development of Eternity).”

Kevin, beginning to feel he has lost all control of his destiny asks,

“And if I refuse?”

To which Chaucer answers somewhat smugly,

“If that is your choice, we will respect it. But realize that you have no money, no housing, and no means...”

Kevin, quickly getting the picture and recognizing the futility of his position, answers,

“Well since you put it that way...I guess I’m delighted to accept.”

Chaucer smiles a broad smile and says,
“Excellent...This way please...”

Meanwhile, Kevin’s travel companion is in a bedroom in the old mansion, examining herself in front of a mirror. She is dressed in a black, jersey, spaghetti-strap, dress that is very sexy and she says to her reflection in the mirror,
“ Not bad...Diana...not bad at all. This’ll get his attention.”

Chaucer leads Kevin through a door into a hallway with a definite residential flavor to it. There is an old fashioned carpet-runner on the floor and the walls are covered with a very old looking wallpaper. Chaucer turns his head to Kevin as they walk and says,

“ Beautiful house isn’t it? She’s magnificent. She has been here almost 200 years... making her already almost 100 years old in your own era.”

Still in her bedroom, Diana has her ear pressed to the door. And when she hears Kevin and Chaucer in the hall she exits her room just as Chaucer is pointing out the bathroom to Kevin,
“This door leads to the bath room...it is unisex, so be sure to knock...”

Diana walks sexily past them as she says to Kevin,
“Hey...thanks for the ride.”

Kevin is a little surprised, but manages to say,
“My pleasure.”

As Diana proceeds down the hall in the opposite direction, Kevin twists his neck around to watch the pleasant sight of her derriere.

Chaucer raises an eyebrow toward Kevin.

And Kevin says as much to himself as to Chaucer,
“Wonder where SHE’s going?”

But Diana is really going nowhere. She dressed up and waited inside her door until she heard them coming, then came out just so Kevin could see her looking sexy.

Two more doors down and across the hall from the bathroom, Chaucer indicates the room where Kevin will bunk down.
“And this will be your room.”

Kevin enters and Chaucer departs...continuing on down the hall opposite the direction that Diana took.

Diana peeks back into the hallway and when Kevin has closed his own door behind him...she sneaks back into her own room. Once inside, she closes the door quietly and leans back against it breathlessly...smiling at her success.

Inside his own room, Kevin begins to realize the magnitude of his experience. He is at once shaken and excited, scared and exuberant. He walks to his own mirror and says to his reflection,
“Unbelievable!

...Now...if I just had some underwear. Can't be an adventurer without any underwear...”

He looks around the room and recognizes that it is furnished in a style that immediately makes him feel at home. The bed is a Paul-Bunyan four poster made of heavy, white oak.... very similar to the one in his own bedroom a hundred years ago. The lamp... the curtains... the overstuffed chair... all seem somehow eerily familiar.

Speaking out loud, Kevin says,
“Place is furnished just like my own bedroom!”

However, what is obviously a video or communications screen is unquestionably not of his era. It really isn't a screen at all as much as a boxlike section of the air in front of the far wall. It is clearly 3-d and has amazing resolution. It has no wires, no feed, no cables (at least none that are visible) and yet a picture shimmers within it of a beach scene somewhere. He concludes that it isn't a program as much as a screen-saver kind of view. He says,
“Wish I had one of THOSE 100 years ago! But ...more importantly... Clothes...clothes...I need clothes.”

Spotting what must be a closet door, he crosses the room and opens it.

Inside the closet are clothes, either his own clothes and his shoes –or exact facsimiles. He smiles to himself and says

“Sweet!”

He quickly rummages in the closet, then the bureau drawers, then the mirror cabinet over the lone sink. And everywhere he looks are items that are either replicas of his stuff from “way back when” or else items that so closely resemble his stuff that it doesn't matter. He muses,
“I guess they DID know I was coming.”

Amazed but exhausted, he throws on a pair of cutoffs and an old tee-shirt (at least it looks old) and collapses on the bed. He closes his eyes and says, “ Night, John Boy.”

He is almost instantly asleep so he doesn't even notice as the lights go out.

End Chapter 1