

CounterClockWise

Chapter 11 – Fountain of Youth

The stage is set in the parking lot of the Outside Inn. Watching intently from her car, Diana is ready when the door to the old inn suddenly opens. She slumps down in her seat a little to make sure she isn't seen.

As the door opens loud music and crowd noises spill into the gloom. She watches a young Kevin step out and sees the door close behind him, restoring the nighttime quietude. He is mumbling something and he stumbles a little -- taking several short quick steps to catch himself.

His tall, athletic frame moves slowly with his head bent down and his hand in his pocket digging for his keys. He reaches the tailgate of his truck and pulls out his keys as the feeble light directly overhead flickers, pops, and goes out...

She watches him look up, then down and shake his head as he grumbles "...And the void was filled with darkness..."

That almost makes her laugh out loud. She covers her mouth with her hand stifling any sound.

He brings his eyes very close to his keys trying to decide which one is for the truck... he holds them up to the night sky hoping to see better from the faint starlight.

Finally finding the right key, he opens the door, gets in and starts the truck. The radio is already on and loud.

Still watching, Diana sees the old truck spring to life and fishtail out of the parking lot before the tires regain their traction on the paved road.

Relieved that it seems to be going as planned, Diana gets out of her car and enters the old Inn to tell Chaucer he can come out of hiding.

Meanwhile HER Kevin is just rematerializing in a room at her old house. Once he is whole, he jumps up from the floor, runs into the next room to grab a coat to cover himself and runs to the garage. He jumps into the only car there and true to Diana's word, the keys are in the ignition.

He quickly starts the car and is roaring out of the driveway when a pickup truck comes out of nowhere and almost hits him. As he accelerates past the truck it swerves into the driveway and lands softly in the ditch.

Kevin is quick to realize what has just happened. No wonder he thought the face in his headlights looked familiar a year ago.

He has just precipitated his own trip into the future. That was himself he almost ran into.

Now a lot of things are clear. His younger self must have been caught in the rebounding field that brought him here. And because the field was almost gone it failed to get him all the way back to the future...but deposited him a full year earlier than the time he left the future for the past.

Shaken a bit, he drives very carefully to his own house, puts on some clothes and heads to the Outside Inn. After all of this, he could use a drink.

He arrives in the parking lot and parks next to another car that looks very familiar. But he is distracted and heads inside.

As he arrives at the bar and the bar tender turns around, he is jolted out of his shoes. It is Chaucer! And he says to Kevin,
“What’ll it be, young man?”

And Kevin excitedly ignores the question, asking one of his own,
“Chaucer, is that you?”

But Chaucer simply answers,
“It’s true my name is Chaucer, and who might you be?”

And from directly behind Kevin, Diana is grinning ear-to-ear as she says,
“Quit teasing him, Chaucer. I think he may have a heart attack.”

Almost beside himself now, at the sound of her voice Kevin whirls around and cannot believe his eyes as he stammers,
“Diana???? How??? ...Never mind...”

He scoops her off the floor and spins around with her in his arms.

Diana is still grinning so widely now her face might split and she says,
“Take it easy, my hero. It can’t have been more than 30 minutes of YOUR time since you last saw me. You act like it’s been 100 years!”

And with tears welling up in his eyes from emotional tension, he replies,
“I think it HAS been 100 years. I was so afraid I might never see you again. When did you get back? ...No don’t tell me here. Let’s go somewhere and have a real talk.”

“Can’t wait,” She replies. “Let’s go, Lover Boy.”

Chaucer simply shakes his head at them as he says,
“You two have fun. I have a bar to run.”

As they leave the bar Chaucer is wiping a bar glass with an old towel and whistling happily.

It is early morning and Kevin and Diana have just arisen from a wonderful night together. Today is their tenth anniversary and they are making it memorable.

Kevin is wearing a pair of black silk, loose fitting, pajama bottoms and no shirt, while Diana is wearing Kevin’s black silk, loose fitting pajama top. On her it is just long enough to make a perfect nightshirt.

As they enter the kitchen of the old mansion to rustle up some breakfast, Kevin says to her,
“Well, my beautiful wife, have I ever told you how proud I am of you?”

And enjoying his playfulness, she smiles and answers,
“No, my faithful husband. Are you proud because of my beauty or my brains?”

Looking her up and down appreciatively, he says,
“Both actually. But what prompted my comment is your incredible work the last couple of years on Longevity. Chaucer and I have been so busy trying to turn this place into the research center it will become in 90 years, that I haven’t had a chance to understand and enjoy your work.”

Relishing his appreciation of her body, she returns the compliment,
“The two of you have done some pretty incredible work in your own right. Establishing the basis for the quantum computers that will be necessary to rebuild the time-machine. And like you I have been so wrapped up in my own work that I am feeling a little left out.”

“Ahh,” he says, “That brings me around to the topic I was aiming at. If you will prepare a briefing of the type that you, and Chaucer and I shared with each other 10 years ago and 90 years in the future. I will do the same and we can catch each other up pretty quickly.”

Surprised, she tells him,
“Now THAT’S a great idea, my hero. Give me a week and I will be the lead-off batter.”

“It’s a deal.” He says. “Chaucer and I finished the office space that we used to meet in ... or will eventually meet in...in the future.”

He grins at the difficulty of talking about convoluted time sequences..

Putting two steaming mugs of black coffee on the table she changes the subject, “You know it’s still a beautiful sunrise outside. Do we have time for a little rahadlakum before breakfast?”

He smiles and says, “A little what?”

Diana playfully pulls on the loose pajama top to reveal a sexy shoulder, and she explains in greater detail, “A little nectar celestial...intercursus between the sheets... A little roll in the clover.... you know ...a little Rahadlakum.

She sings the last word as she did many years ago when she played the role of Lalume in the musical *Kismet*.

Kevin laughs good naturedly at his wife trying to be naughty. He says, “Name the place, my little vixen. I would share the nectar celestial with you on the interstate if that’s what you choose.”

Her eyes light up at that idea, but she says, “Hmmm – I am tempted, but let’s go for under the oak tree in our private courtyard.”

Kevin takes her by the hand and gently leads her out the side door saying, “Never heard so many strange names for a most exhilarating subject. Sometimes it’s damned hard to communicate with a brilliant woman!”

True to her word, a week later, Diana has prepared a briefing for Chaucer and her husband. Chaucer has done a remarkable job in making their Mark3 CyberSystem perform some of the presentation functions that Jeeves used to ...or will one day perform. Mark3 is no Jeeves, but it is still a big help.

Diana starts the presentation with a voice command to Mark3, “Play!” she says.

And the Mark3 begins, “An enduring dream of humankind is to find the ‘Fountain of Youth,’ a way to prevent the deterioration of aging. There are five primary factors that cause aging. oxidative stress, glycation, telomere shortening and chronological age - along with various genes.

“TELOMERES

Think for a moment about a fertilized egg dividing and dividing into the 100 trillion cells in your body. If every cell kept dividing forever, you would just be a huge, round mass of identical cells. So there has to be a process that tells some cells to stop dividing after so many divisions.

“But how does a cell manage to count the number of times it has divided? The answer appears to be a balance between telomeres and telomerase.

“Telomeres are short sequences of so-called junk DNA that occupy the ends of our chromosomes. They are repeated thousands of times. Every time a cell divides the chromosome cannot be replicated to the very end...a few pairs at the end get left off of the copy. So chromosomes get shorter with each cell division.

“Since telomeres are NOT vital, this shortening does not affect the functioning of the cell in any way until the telomere gets critically short – then the cell shuts down completely. In some cells like reproductive cells that must be able to divide forever, an enzyme called telomerase repairs this damage to the telomere after each cell division.

“OXIDATIVE STRESS

Our bodies burn oxygen to live. This oxidation liberates molecules with unpaired electrons and before these unpaired electrons can be taken into the antioxidant systems of the body, damage is done to cell structures, DNA, RNA, and proteins. This is thought to leave the cells of the body in a state of diminished vitality, a kind of damage, which is not fully repairable.

“GLYCATION

Another factor in aging is "glycation." It happens when glucose sugar from what we eat binds to some of our DNA, proteins and lipids, leaving them unable to do their jobs. The problem becomes worse as we get older, causing body tissues to malfunction, resulting in disease and death. This may explain why studies in various laboratory animals indicate that restricting calorie intake extends lifespan.

“GENES

Currently, the best recipe for a long life is to choose your parents carefully. Longevity shows a statistical tendency to run in families, and the life spans of identical twins are more similar to each other than life spans of non-identical twins. Also the subject of much recent research, simple organisms like fruit flies and nematode worms have revealed a range of gene mutations that markedly affect the length of life. Unquestionably there are genes that affect aging.

“All of these aging factors can be ameliorated to some degree. And where oxidative damage and glycation cannot be prevented, repairs can be made.

As the screen fades to black, Chaucer asks, “What is the theoretical limit for the human lifespan, Diana?”

And she quickly answers, “Without modification to genes and cell structures, Chaucer, it is about 120 to 130 years. But we can provide help from several fronts including Genetic Manipulation, Stem Cells, MEMS, and Nanotech

With these gene modifications and damage reparations, the human lifespan is at least 250 years ... and some believe it may be as long as 1000 years.”

Kevin is stunned,
“Wow,” he says, “that was terrific, Diana. How close are you to addressing some of those issues in reality.”

And she surprises him again when she answers,
“Well, I am actually ready to address some of them right now. I suggest the three of us undertake a regimen that will prevent telomeres from shortening, prevent untimely apoptosis, and modify the aging genes we know about. These alone should take us to 150-175 years and when you two have MEMS and nanotech solutions to repair whatever else goes awry, we could easily see 250 years or even more.”

Thoughtful now, Kevin says,
“Now THAT raises an interesting question!”

And Chaucer asks, “What is that, Kevin?”

“Well,” Kevin answers him, “when Diana told me that you and she spoke with my older self in the future, I assumed that we had completed a time-machine here in our era and that I used it to travel into the future.”

And Diana agrees, “Me too. That’s a logical assumption. What are you thinking now.”

He answers, “Well after today, you have convinced me that we could simply live long enough to return to that era... using the SLOW but natural method of time-travel...one instant at a time.”

Chaucer imitates the German soldier from the old *Laugh In* show as he says,
“Velly Ineteresting!”

End Chapter 11