

# A LOVE BEYOND TIME

A one-act play

by Michael Barry

(loosely based on an idea of John Wyndham)

**The setting** includes the living-room of Jamie Corewell's Somerset cottage as well as the front door, path and gate to part of a country lane.

A sofa, chairs and work table (complete with personal computer and printer) are in the living-room. A bush or two is in the garden.

**The time** is today.

**The characters** are:

Jamie Corewell, 30s, technical writer.

Altara, 21, history student.

Prof. Tetro Thucydison, uncle to Altara, research historian, elderly, absent-minded.

2 men, History Lab assistants

Police Sergeant.

**Time passes** – between scenes. There are various ways this can be done and the real time taken for Time to Pass should be as minimal as possible.

Maybe a big clock face is spotlit and has hands that start revolving quickly; maybe a large pendulum is swung from side to side near front of stage; maybe (my favourite) a 1' model of a snail on little wheels trundles from pros arch to pros arch pulled on nylon wires.

Any of these or other devices could be accompanied by a montage of ticking and striking clocks that reach some sort of crescendo, then fade away into the next scene.

The years mentioned in the script and the description of the two men given to the police should be adjusted to fit in with the real here and now.

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v 4

The Counting House

Dodington

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**SCENE 1. MORNING.**

JAMIE IS WRITING AN ARTICLE AT HIS COMPUTER IN LIVING-ROOM. THUCYDISON ENTERS FROM THE LANE, KNOCKS AT FRONT DOOR. HIS DRESS IS A BIT PECULIAR. JAMIE ANSWERS.

THUCYDISON                    Top of the morning. Listen up please: my name is Thucydison - Prof Tetro Thucydison. Please give me time, Sir James – I hope that is the phrase you use, strange though I find it. I do have to discuss with you an issue of intense importance.

JAMIE                             Sir James!! Where on earth - ?

THUCYDISON                    You are not Sir James Corewell? But I checked your image before setting out. It was 10 years older maybe, but the similarity is striking.

JAMIE                             I am now totally confused! I am Jamie Corewell – Mr. Jamie Corewell.

THUCYDISON (CONSULTING A COMPLEX WATCH)

Ah! Right on! I have it! Silly me! But could I please have a few words with you

JAMIE (HESITATES)            Yes - all right; come in. Do have a seat. Would you like a drink? Or a coffee?

THUCYDISON                    Drugs? Oh no, no - no, thanks.

JAMIE                             Fair enough. Let's cut to the chase -

THUCYDISON (PRODUCES NOTEBOOK, JOTS NOTE DOWN)

Cut to the chase! I like it!

JAMIE                             - and – find out what the problem is?

THUCYDISON                    OK, listen up! We really cannot let Altara stay here a moment longer. Historical reverberations – yes? Repercussions if we're unlucky! The outcome can be beyond your wildest imagining! And I'll be blamed! The greenback stops with me.

JAMIE                             Buck!

THUCYDISON                    Greenbuck?

JAMIE                             The "buck" stops with you?

THUCYDISON                    Does it? Ah, right on! The buck stops with me. No green-back?

JAMIE SHAKES HIS HEAD. THUCYDISON ENTERS A NOTE IN HIS BOOK.

THUCYDISON                    So you see – immense harm can be done!

JAMIE                             I'm sure it can!

THUCYDISON                    So – she can come back with me?

JAMIE                             Who?

THUCYDISON                    Altara.

JAMIE                             Really, Dr Thucy -

THUCYDISON                    Thucydison! A son of Thucydides, yes? Historian, you see. We have precise generational and clan denominations as well, of course – but not for normal social interchange. I shouldn't be saying this, of course.

JAMIE                             Either way – I'm expecting to wake up from this Alice in Wonderland nightmare any moment.

THUCYDISON                    Lewis Carroll 1871 – that nightmare?!

JAMIE I'm totally confused –

THUCYDISON Are you really?

JAMIE Just who is Altara?

THUCYDISON Who is -? (PAUSE TO THINK THEN RE-CONSULT WATCH) OCI!  
You haven't met her yet?

JAMIE Right! She's a total stranger to me.

THUCYDISON Then where on earth has she got to?

JAMIE Have you tried the police?

THUCYDISON The police? Good Heavens! Er – no! OCI! Those settings will get me in serious trouble one day. Right on! Listen up! There has been a technical error. (LOOKS AT WATCH) 2 or 3 years possibly. I will try again – but please, right now – just forget about this visit of mine.

JAMIE How could I ever forget -

THUCYDISON Please try. Just accept that timing is not my strong point. Observation of detail is my strong point and (WAVING NOTEBOOK) this visit has been very rewarding from that point of view. 2008, yes? Right on!

THEY HEAD FOR THE DOOR.

JAMIE: I really will try to forget after all!

THUCYDISON I'll just say - er "a bientot"! French, yes? Is that right?

JAMIE It *might* be right. It's certainly confusing! A straight "goodbye" would be much more appropriate.

THUCYDISON Yes. I'm sorry. (EXITS THROUGH FRONT DOOR) Goodbye then - Sir - Mr Corewell. See you in – I'll try 2010.

***Time passes.***

## **SCENE 2: TWO YEARS LATER**

JAMIE IS POTTERING IN HIS GARDEN. HE WEARS AN OUTER GARDENING-TYPE GARMENT.

ALTARA RUNS UP TO THE GATE BREATHLESSLY (WEARING SOME MILDLY OUTDATED, POSSIBLY SCRUFFY, CLOTHES LIKE A MINISKIRT AND DOC MARTENS AND A TRENDY T-SHIRT WITH A TIME-RELATED QUOTE ON FRONT – eg "Time and Tide Wait for no Woman" – or better). SHE SEES HIM, STANDS FROZEN FOR A MOMENT SPEECHLESS.

ALTARA Knockout! You – are – gorgeous! (SUDDEN PANIC) OCI, OCI, OCI!

SHE DIVES DOWN BEHIND ONE OF THE BUSHES.

JAMIE Good Heavens, what's a girl like you doing in a bush like that? On second thoughts, don't answer that!

ALTARA (URGENTLY) Are they here?

JAMIE They?.

ALTARA Those men?

JAMIE Er – no! Not that I can see.

ALTARA I'm being pursued.

JAMIE Stalked?

ALTARA Stalked? Is that it?

JAMIE Well, I'm asking you?

1st MAN (OFF, CALLING) Down on the lane.

2nd MAN (OFF, DISTANT) I see it!

ALTARA OCI! Hide me, please. Quickly!

SHE RUNS CROUCHING TOWARDS THE OPEN FRONT DOOR

JAMIE There is a guy up on the hillside.

ALTARA Don't let them get me – please Jamie, help me!

JAMIE How do you - ? Oh never mind.

HE FOLLOWS HER INTO HOUSE AND CLOSES THE DOOR

1<sup>st</sup> MAN (OFF) Yes – that small house – I saw her!

2<sup>nd</sup> MAN (OFF) Right on!

ALTARA Those men – they are – dangerous! They – mean me harm. I'm not safe!

JAMIE Well, I'm only one against two.

ALTARA Where can I hide?

JAMIE They've seen you here, I'm afraid.

ALTARA I know – you do police, don't you!

JAMIE Well –

ALTARA A police force! That's it. The force – we need it.

JAMIE Well – there is a constable lives in the village, but he'll be out at work. The station is miles away.

ALTARA (DESPAIRING) Oh no! They'll spirit me away if you don't save me. None of it will ever happen. Oh Jamie, please – I've done so much to get here. You will so regret it if I have to disappear.

JAMIE (DIALLING) The phone is here. You do the talking. I'll bolt both doors. Hello, Sergeant - Jamie Corewell at Briar Cottage in Nether Dodington. There is a young lady here who wants a word with you.

1st MAN ENTERS LANE. ALTARA TAKES PHONE. 1st MAN WALKS TO DOOR AS JAMIE BOLTS IT, THEN DASHES OFF TO BOLT BACK DOOR.

ALTARA Hello - is this the police? Yes - I'm being followed by two men.... at Briar Cottage, yes.... yes, please hurry, I'm in danger....no - they're at the front door now, please.... oh, thank-you, please hurry. Goodbye.

THE NEXT DIALOGUE IS CONCURRENT WITH ALTARA'S PHONE CALL. JAMIE RUNS BACK ON.

1st MAN Altara! Come out! Open up! Altara!

JAMIE (OPENS DOOR) And what can I do for you?

1st MAN Altara! Come here!

JAMIE Hold on! Just a minute, you – what the hell do you think you're doing?

1st MAN You wouldn't begin to understand (TRIES TO PUSH PAST HIM)

JAMIE You really think so. Then try understanding this.



SERGEANT Duffel coats and sandals??

JAMIE She's quite right, Sergeant - duffel coats and sandals!

SERGEANT Good heavens! They shouldn't get far unnoticed!

JAMIE (LAUGHING) No - absolutely not!

ALTARA Why? What's wrong with duffel coats and sandals?

JAMIE What do you mean "What's wrong with them"?

ALTARA Well - they're in period, aren't they?

JAMIE In period?? Well no - not exactly.

SERGEANT What about the men themselves? What did they look like?

ALTARA Both youngish - in their 20s. One had (*whatever*) hair and was tall/ short. The other was (*whatever*). That's all I can say about them really.

SERGEANT Well that's quite a lot to go on, thank-you. We'll keep a look out for them. They may not be too far away. Well I must be getting along. Can I give you a lift into the village then Miss?

ALTARA Er - no - thank-you. Mr Corewell is giving me some tea.

JAMIE Oh yes – so I am!

SERGEANT Very well. We can contact you here? Good. Good morning, Miss.

ALTARA Good-bye - and thank-you very much.

JAMIE LETS THE SERGEANT OUT. ALTARA LOOKS AT PHOTOS ON A SIDE TABLE.

JAMIE Well, feeling better now? (ALTARA NODS) I suppose we'd better introduce ourselves. I'm Jamie Corewell.

ALTARA Of course you are. I am Altara - Corewell.

JAMIE Altara?... And Corewell! Are we related then?

ALTARA Oh dear! Here we go – the moment I've been dreading.

JAMIE Dreading?

ALTARA Yes – we are related.

JAMIE Presumably quite distantly? I've never heard of you before.

ALTARA (WEAK LAUGH) No, I can quite understand that you won't have heard of me.

JAMIE No, no, there's something - Altara? Yes, of course, that weird fellow who turned up here. He was looking for someone with a name like that.

ALTARA Who – was he? Not one of those two apes who -

JAMIE No! Someone quite – educated. Very polite. Goodi – son? Something -

ALTARA Thucydison!

JAMIE Yes, that was it!. Historian, he said.

ALTARA Is he here?

JAMIE No, no - that was - two or three years ago now.

ALTARA (LAUGHING) Knockout! Uncle Tetro! Couldn't steer his monocab to save his life!

JAMIE Monocab?

ALTARA Monorail Mobile Cabin!! Oh, well, whatever! Basically they don't need steering, yes? Done automatically with force fields. OK? It's just a cliché for a technophobe? What I'm saying is – he's not very good at anything technical. He'll be back though.

JAMIE Funny you should say that! He did say something like "See you in 2010".

ALTARA Is that the time?

JAMIE My brain needs a rest.

ALTARA Well, it's just that it's later than I thought. Oh sorry, Jamie – you can't possibly understand yet! That photo – is that your wife? Where is she? Has she left you yet?

JAMIE You what?

ALTARA You are married?

JAMIE No! Not yet anyway! That's my sister in Australia.

ALTARA Your sister! Jenny?? (SUDDENLY HYSTERICAL) Oh my God, this is just too much – I mean, wow – OC! Ah, sorry – bit of a shock. Isn't she lovely though!

JAMIE Sure, she's a very nice – sister!

ALTARA Sorry, took me by surprise! Coming face to face with my – ah, no, sorry!

JAMIE I'll just get the tea.

HE EXITS, CLATTERS ABOUT A BIT IN HIS KITCHEN. ALTARA STANDS BY THE EXIT.

ALTARA No, no, that's weird! Really, really weird! Your wife, I mean - she's supposed to desert you. I just couldn't trace the timing. Oh, OK, me! This is where it gets difficult. Which is why I keep avoiding it, I guess. Let me start with what I do – history? Like my uncle. I love it. It appeals to my imagination.

JAMIE RETURNS WITH MUGS OF TEA, MILK, SUGAR.

JAMIE Well, chacun a son gout!

ALTARA Hey, that was French, right! Yeah, remember that. We still study dead languages, you know.

JAMIE Digression! Back to the point before I need a sedative. History?

ALTARA History! You see, I have a real affinity for it – well, for this period especially.

JAMIE This period? Modern history?

ALTARA Well, to you, yes. Actually it's the 70s and 80s really – that's the 1970s and 80s OK? – that I feel most strongly about. Obviously this is a bit later – because of your age and the date of your inventions and – "stuff"! "Stuff" – love it! But going into the early 70s is my biggest ambition.

JAMIE Well I suppose it is coming into focus now as a historical period.

ALTARA To me it's the Early Electronic Revolution - but so full of life!

JAMIE Was it? I was just a kid so don't remember much.

ALTARA The Iron Lady – wasn't she fantastic!

JAMIE Good God! Pass! Still a contentious issue!

ALTARA And the most famous quote of the entire period “Lunch is for wimps”! Wow – isn’t that just knockout? “Knockout”’s OK isn’t it?

JAMIE Pass!

ALTARA “Lunch is for – “ Oh Jamie darling, I’m sorry.

JAMIE Listen young woman – we’ve only just met! We really don’t call each other darling until we know each other very well. Unless we’re actors, of course! They’ll call anyone darling!

ALTARA But we will. Trust me!

JAMIE Will what?

ALTARA Know each other very well. Extremely well! Very, very, very intimately!

JAMIE (GULP) 1970! Yes? History! There are plenty of books to get you into it if you feel so strongly about it.

ALTARA Not the same thing as being there! If you go there then you write the book. So I guess for me it’ll have to be a book about whatever it – 2010, yes! Yes, why not! I can do it while I’m here.

JAMIE You’re staying?

ALTARA Of course – you’re hosting me, aren’t you? “Putting me up” – oh, that period phrase is so redolent! Don’t you think? Or is it just my dirty mind?

JAMIE You want to come to a tiny rural hamlet in Somerset to get an overview of today? You can search online for that from anywhere in the world. What on earth is wrong with – wherever you live?

ALTARA Wherever I live?! North-west Rural Swindon 18! Not exactly on a par with Windsorian Nether Dodington! Anyway, it’s coming to now that counts, not coming to Somerset as such.

JAMIE I do need that sedative. I knew I would! I’m sure I’ve got some somewhere.

ALTARA Oh sorry, Jamie, sorry, sorry, sorry! It’ll make sense soon, I promise.

JAMIE I don’t believe that! At all!!

ALTARA It’s just so hard to explain without me giving you a heart attack or something. So – for just a moment longer – history! The late 20<sup>th</sup> century – give or take – has just so many things that really excite me.

JAMIE I’m very glad. Maybe a strong lunchtime whisky would do instead. To hell with tea!

HE POURS HIMSELF A LARGE WHISKY, MAYBE ADDING SODA OR WATER.

JAMIE You’re not “into drugs”, I suppose – like your weird uncle, I remember.

ALTARA No, certainly not. Well, not yet, anyway. Give me time to acclimatize! I’ll just take one of these if you’re going to ingest that. Alcohol, isn’t it?

SHE POPS A PILL FROM AN UNUSUAL PILL WALLET SHE HAS ON HER.

ALTARA Obviously the reality of any period isn’t all peaches and cream. There’s always a dark side to be taken into account.

JAMIE (SARDONIC) Oh yes – there’s always a dark side! I’ll drink to that! Cheers!

ALTARA Well, as I say – the things one could do! Fancy being at the first night of an Alan Ayckbourn play! In a real theatre too! Or buying a new Tolkien work on the day of publishing!

JAMIE Bit late for that, I'm afraid.

ALTARA Really? Are you sure?

JAMIE Definite!

ALTARA Oh, what a shame! Well, it's still a thrilling era! "Brill" as you would say!

JAMIE No I certainly wouldn't! You might try "wicked" though!

ALTARA Wicked! Great!

JAMIE But your enthusiasm is nice. Your mind-blowing alienation from everyday reality is quite stunning though - me being sane and grounded in my humble present-tense life.

ALTARA Well obviously! As I say perspective is everything. If you could compare your present-tense life with mine, for example, you'd see at once.

JAMIE See?

ALTARA The differences. The boredom, sameness, dullness, flatness, uniformity, sanitised to such an extent that all the life has gone out of it! OK, no mess, no disease to speak of, no poverty, no ignorance – but no individuality, no eccentricity, no character! Bor – ring!! (WAVES PILLS) We really need these! Dull the edges when it all gets too much.

JAMIE Well, I have to own up and say I'm losing the plot a little. At last! It is a good whisky!

ALTARA No really! You just try living in our age and someone like you'd just go out of your mind!

JAMIE "Our age"?!

ALTARA Ah yes! Deep breath!! Here we go! Our age! Our - century!

JAMIE (WAVING GLASS, CROSSING TO DRINKS TRAY) I'll just – top this up, I think. Those pills – what exactly are you on? Hallucinatory, I guess?

ALTARA (FIRMLY) My century! The late 22<sup>nd</sup> century!

JAMIE Of course! Silly me! Cheers!

ALTARA Oh Jamie darling – that's the worst over now, promise! Is that a bit difficult to take in?

JAMIE Ye-es! Just a little!

ALTARA Well, now at least we're singing in the same ship together.

JAMIE In a manner of speaking!

ALTARA Well - feeling like that about the late 20th century is why I took up History and go to an Advanced History Academy to do my degree. And the date on your letter – oh dear, I think I've kind of blanked it out. Any way it led me to the Millennium period for my special subject – rather than the 1970s. And then PhD research – Doctor of Philosophy, yes?

JAMIE Yes! We even do PhDs in this prehistoric era!

ALTARA Now don't make fun of me! I focussed on developmental phase AI computer program languages for my thesis – you know – LISP and PROLOG and AIDS – that kind of stuff!

JAMIE AIDS?

ALTARA Artificial Intelligence Diagnostic Syntax? Might just be a few years to go before it's developed, possibly.

JAMIE We might have to eradicate the disease first!

ALTARA What disease?

JAMIE AIDS!

ALTARA Oh, right on! Like syphilis and stuff? Yes that got mentioned in our classes on Early Reproductive Methodology. Well yes, make sense, I guess. Can't use the same acronym for two completely different things!

JAMIE Well, in fact, it is done. The AA for example – both of them! I shall soon need to join one of them, I guess!

ALTARA (CLOSE TO HIM) Anyway, all of this is just to explain to you, Jamie darling, that I had to do all that! For you! There's dedication for you – devotion, utter, utter devotion!

JAMIE Is it?

ALTARA Of course it is – I had to do all that just to get access to a history machine.

JAMIE History machine? Is that an AI machine? Sort of 3D regeneration of historical periods?

ALTARA Oh, no – they're very old hat nowadays. Well, still used in schools of course. No, a history machine – you actually get into it to go to the period of your choice.

JAMIE A time machine?!

ALTARA Well, OK! Sounds much the same kind of thing.

JAMIE So that's how you reckon you got here?

ALTARA In a coconut!

JAMIE In a nutshell! So – you're telling me – after I've had two large whiskies and you've popped a pill or two – so we're both sane, sober and rational – that you're a relative of mine from 21 or 22 something?

ALTARA 2182.

JAMIE Of course – 2182! Silly me! And you've just hopped into a – History Machine to come and visit me in 2010 because I wrote you a letter?

ALTARA Yes – in a – nutshell!

JAMIE So why isn't the rest of the family here? Visiting their prehistoric relatives? Why isn't half the population of North West Rustic Downtown Swindon 37½ all here on their afternoon off?

ALTARA Ah, no, no, you see, it's seriously difficult to get access to a history machine. There are only 4 or 5 in the whole Federated Islands of Britain.

JAMIE Oh my God! I'll just –

HE WAVES GLASS AT HER, THEN FILLS IT. ONE GLUG AND HIS IMAGINATION HYPES UP.

ALTARA And they're guarded round the clock. Only Licensed Fellows of the Grand Historical College can use them – and then only after months of consultation and scrutiny of their Visitation proposals.

JAMIE Makes sense – though it must be really hitting our tourism economy hard. So – you did all this?

ALTARA No, Jamie, I didn't. I was so desperate to come and visit you after getting your letter, I sliced every bend –

JAMIE Cut every corner? Wey-hey!

ALTARA Whatever! - to get here by the quickest route. You see, Uncle Tetro is licensed and has one of the History Machines in his lab. So naturally I became one of his lab assistants.

JAMIE And hopped on board when no-one was looking?

ALTARA Which is why everyone is in a panic. In case I explode an anachronism.

JAMIE When something happens out of time?

ALTARA When a licensed historian interferes and changes history.

JAMIE Hey, hey, hey! This whisky is really working! I'm beginning to really enjoy this amazing flight of fancy! So – frowned on, is it? Exploding anachronisms?

ALTARA Right on! Especially what we call a Passionate Anachronism.

JAMIE Of course!! As you say – right on! I'll drink to one of them!

ALTARA Oh Jamie – you're letting the drug overpower your faculties!

JAMIE That is the whole point of the exercise! However, I still think one or other of us – and maybe even both – needs to consult a psychiatrist at the earliest possible opportunity.

ALTARA You just don't believe me, do you?

JAMIE Pass! So this letter I wrote to you – what exactly did I say in it?

ALTARA IS SUDDENLY SPEECHLESS, LOOKS AT HIM HELPLESSLY, LOSES HER CONTROL AND BURSTS INTO TEARS.

ALTARA You don't love me. You don't even like me! You're so cold and hostile and – and - I wish I'd never come. I wish I was dead.

***Time passes.***

**SCENE 3. THE NEXT DAY.**

JAMIE ENTERS WITH COFFEE MUG, NO LONGER WEARING OUTER GARDENING GARMENT. ALTARA, IN AN OLD DRESSING-GOWN, FOLLOWS WITH A GLASS OF FRUIT-JUICE.

JAMIE You slept well, didn't you?

ALTARA That's not the point!

JAMIE So what is the point?

ALTARA The point is we've wasted so much precious time in separate night-rooms!

JAMIE But of course! We've only just met!

ALTARA But that is so – coy! Hypocritical!

JAMIE Hypocritical! Why?

ALTARA Because we're so obviously deeply attracted to each other! Why waste time over archaic courting rituals?

JAMIE Archaic?!

ALTARA Time wasting is THE cardinal sin! To us!

JAMIE Young lady, I haven't even decided if I like you, let alone anything else!

ALTARA Of course you do! You love me passionately – you just don't know it yet!

JAMIE You really do have –

ALTARA But you do have marriage then – now I mean! And organic babies and stuff! That all counts in your favour. And you're really not married yet!! Wicked! (LOOKING AT JAMIE SPECULATIVELY) I wonder if we'll -

JAMIE Changing subject quickly! You owe me a much better explanation of what you were saying yesterday.

ALTARA But you didn't believe anything I said yesterday.

JAMIE It was all so seriously far-fetched.

ALTARA "Was"?

JAMIE Well, I guess I do have to give you credit for coherence – for telling an integrated story. Thinking about it last night I couldn't identify where any flaw in your – presentation – might lie.

ALTARA You lay awake trying to pick holes in my –

JAMIE Your clothes! Must be dry now. There was one thing that jumped out at me though – where exactly is your Time Machine? In the garden? A sort of police box, perhaps?

JAMIE EXITS INTO KITCHEN, ALTARA MOVES TO KITCHEN DOOR AREA.

ALTARA What! No Jamie, it's not – in the garden! It's not a physical object as such! The settings are physical enough – preset in the lab. But the transference is in a virtual environment – a sort of force field, yes? It's basically instantaneous – so there are no fuel systems, support systems, spatial protection measures, anti-gravity procedures – as in your early spacecraft, for example.

JAMIE RETURNS WITH ALTARA'S TOP AND MINI-SKIRT, NOW DRY AFTER WASHING. DURING NEXT PAGES HE SETS UP AN IRONING BOARD, PLUGS IN IRON AND IRONS THEM..

JAMIE So how do you – return? If you haven't any controls – or settings with you?

ALTARA (HOLDS UP PILL PACK) One of these capsules regenerates the original VTO – Virtual Transference Environment, which simply operates in reverse from the original. It's all automated.

JAMIE So those men – wanting to take you back?

ALTARA If you link in a closed circle – holding hands for example – to close the human energy ring – then the VTO covers everyone in that circle.

JAMIE Bit early to start on the whisky, I suppose.

ALTARA Yes, it is! We've moved beyond that now, surely!

JAMIE Alright, alright! Those men – and your uncle too – kept going on about repercussions and danger. Is this to do with anachronisms?

ALTARA Absolutely! When the History Machine was first developed and trialed, a rigorous study of comparative records was made and immediately the problems became apparent.

JAMIE Like what?

ALTARA Well, did you know for example that way back Leonardo da Vinci – artist and engineer and everything else, right?

JAMIE Yep – heard of him!

ALTARA Well he started designing parachutes, yes? When there wasn't anything he could parachute from! Lateral thinking or what? Vivid imagination? I don't think! A stupid half-educated historian from Essex caused that. Carelessness. Sheer unmitigated carelessness.

JAMIE Didn't Napoleon have ideas about submarines, now you mention it?

ALTARA Yes, another early visit! That one, believe it or not, was a female student engineer from Paris who fancied a passionate anachronism – that's a Vivid Carnal Coupling, yes? – with her all-time hero. So she copied some plans and took them with her as her bargaining weapon – not too hot in the looks department, I heard! Anyway, once she showed Napoleon what she had to offer, he agreed, gave her what she wanted and kept the plans to help him invade the British Region.

JAMIE Napoleon was proposing to invade us in a submarine?!

ALTARA Well – as it turned out, building the thing was way beyond the state of technology at that time.

JAMIE Thank God for that! I can certainly see how history might be affected by something like that!

ALTARA Then the stupid woman returned – pregnant! She ejected a son of Napoleon into – 2169, I think. So he's about 13 now – and under constant psychological evaluation. Especially now!

JAMIE Why especially now?

ALTARA Testosterone? Increases aggression, right? So in his case, it's obviously important to monitor it constantly.

JAMIE Well, of course! Would be, wouldn't it! (TURNS OFF IRON, PUTS BOARD AGAINST WALL) But – there's a fly in the ointment here!

ALTARA Which ointment?

JAMIE I'm going to put a spanner in the works!

ALTARA What works?

JAMIE Figures of speech!

ALTARA Figures of speech work?!

JAMIE Let me start again: if something has already happened, then it's happened and the results are here today. So surely you can't go back in time from today and change something, because then the results wouldn't be here today. (PAUSE) You follow me?

ALTARA No, can't say I do.

JAMIE If you went back 60 years – from now, I mean – and killed my grandfather, then I couldn't be here, could I?

ALTARA Absolutely right! You never would have been.

JAMIE OK, bad example. Suppose I went back 60 years and killed my grandfather, then I couldn't have been born, so I wouldn't be here and couldn't go back 60 years and kill my grandfather, in which case he would live and so, as a result, I could be here, in which case I could go back 60 years and surely we'd end up in a self-perpetuating loop or –

ALTARA No, no, no! Wrong!

JAMIE I can't be wrong! I'm never wrong!!

ALTARA Is that why you're still single?!

JAMIE Hey, you! That's going too far! Just because I've saved you from time-warp muggers and put you up for a night, doesn't give you the right to start criticizing me.

ALTARA OK, fair enough, Jamie – my apologies! I'm just trying to get to know you as best I can.

JAMIE Well, maybe don't, OK! Give me my space! I'm the one doing you a favour here, yes?

ALTARA OK, point taken! I'm sorry!

JAMIE OK, fair enough! Right! Good! OK - now tell me how I'm wrong!

ALTARA If you are here and you do go back in time and kill your grandfather, then something has to give. Because you can do that. Technically there's nothing to it. It's forbidden, of course -

JAMIE Well, I'm glad to hear it!

ALTARA - but assume you did, there would have to be a version of events which is a logical outcome of your act.

JAMIE So what does that mean?

ALTARA I mean that it would then turn out that your grand-mother married again and one of her children from her second marriage would be the one who turned out to be your father – or mother.

JAMIE Oh my God!

ALTARA In other words, the man you thought was your grand-father strictly speaking wasn't, he was just your grand-mother's first husband. No, the old idea that you couldn't change the past only holds up as long as you can't change it. And once you can change the past, a major regulatory structure has to be put into place to control it.

JAMIE And someone like you has to find a way to beat the system?

ALTARA Absolutely! A massive course of action affecting my whole newly adult life – just to be with you, Jamie! Please don't tell me I've made a big mistake!

JAMIE That is all just so scary! I'm sorry, but it is! (PAUSE) So – how did you beat the system?

ALTARA It was so hard! I couldn't even get my period costume from the lab's normal suppliers, you know?

JAMIE So what did you do?

ALTARA I researched it all myself and had to make everything myself! Me!! I'd never even patched up my own contact wrap before!

JAMIE Contact wrap?!

ALTARA Don't you call it - ? No, of course you don't, I know that! You have these (TAKES OFF DRESSING-GOWN, REVEALING BRA, PANTIES AND TRANSLUCENT PETTICOAT) – “bra” and “panties”? And petticoat? Just look – I made them myself – aren't they fantastic!

JAMIE (GULP) Eye-catching! Especially the – right! Here! (HANDS HER SKIRT AND TOP) Though I think the Doc Martens (OR WHATEVER) craze has waned a bit. But they're still around.

ALTARA (PUTTING THEM ON) Ugly aren't they? Can I change them - you don't have sneakers, do you?

JAMIE Trainers! Probably. We'll look in a moment.

ALTARA Hey - wicked! Well, that's it really. I had to try my plan out first, make sure it worked – that the clothes seemed acceptable, I could operate the preset controls, time the return capsule correctly, and so on. I had to be careful of course – because time is cotemporaneous – it passes equally in both periods.

JAMIE How do you mean?

ALTARA Well – if I'm here for 24 hours – which I almost have been – then I'm gone from 2182 for the same length of time.

JAMIE Couldn't you arrange to arrive back 5 minutes before you left?

ALTARA I have a feeling there are residual induction fields that prevent it. However, it then went all wrong. I'd just got back from one of my test runs and was emerging from the launch pod when a lab assistant saw me. He immediately raised the alarm, so I had to relaunch immediately – and here I am – with them right behind me as you saw.

JAMIE Will they be back?

ALTARA Almost certainly. So will Uncle Tetro.

JAMIE Will they get violent?

ALTARA Well, no more than yesterday.

JAMIE No guns or anything?

ALTARA Oh no, killing someone is a Category A Anachronism. They'd never work again if they committed a Cat A. But a lobal stunner though, that's the real problem.

JAMIE So they're seriously concerned about all your anachronisms?

ALTARA Yes, but that's a first reaction. If they only take the time to look up the records, they'll see mine are all accounted for. (CLOSE TO HIM) You see, I have to be here, Jamie darling! I am sorry if you don't feel it yet – but I have to be here - with you – being intimate, having a passionate anachronism, doing such a lot of Vivid Carnal Coupling – because if I don't then our history – in 2182 – won't be correct.

JAMIE Oh my God – I'm just a pawn in someone else's history lesson!

ALTARA But you'll love it, believe me! OCI! You've no idea how good I'm going to be to you – no idea! I suspect we know so much more about Advanced Intimacy Procedures than you do in – 20 thing! We study it in great detail! It's compulsory! It's a political priority – to keep us all happy, you see. And I know it works – you could never have written such a passionate letter to a girl in your time – you could only ever write like that to me!

JAMIE Well! Golly!

ALTARA Can I ask you a question?

JAMIE Let me ask you one first. What is all this OCI stuff?

ALTARA Oh, right on! I guess it was about 50 to 60 years ago – they all decided to scrap God – well, all the assorted Gods everyone followed. There were just so many! The problem was quite acute by then because just about all of these Gods kept requiring their followers to go to war and kill as many other people as possible for them. And our reproductive procedures just couldn't keep up with the sophisticated bombs that everyone kept blowing each other up with.

JAMIE So population levels were getting low?!

ALTARA Dangerously so! Well the CWN – the Combined World Nations – it's new to you, right? They eventually agreed to get rid of all these gods formally and replace them all with an official amalgam that was flexible enough to suit all, but was effectively neutered of aggressions. And it really worked – 80% of wars just disappeared. Anyway this Combigo was the "Original Creative Initiator".

JAMIE The OCI – wow! Great – about time too!

ALTARA Well – it's at least another 100 – 120? - years from now, so don't get too excited!

JAMIE So you saying "OCI" is just swearing?

ALTARA: Right on! It's our official authorised swear word. We're taught it in Primary School.

JAMIE OK – your turn.

ALTARA Good! So - when two lovers get married - in 20 thing - do they still get dressed up for it in a very glamorous and expensive way?

BLACKOUT

*Time passes.*

#### SCENE 4. ONE MONTH LATER.

JAMIE AND ALTARA IN MATCHING BATH-ROBES, ALTARA WITH TRAINERS. JAMIE LAYS TABLE

JAMIE Breakfast, darling!

ALTARA (OFF, SLEEPY) Mmmm! Just coming!

JAMIE Just toast and coffee today!

ALTARA (OFF) Oh, no!!

JAMIE 'Fraid so! Reality kicks in! Can't have a full English breakfast every day! It's just not healthy!

ALTARA (ENTERING) But it's so lovely! Primitive but amazingly delicious! Eating all that utterly gross bacon and eggs – and baked beans – what a discovery! I'm going to devote a whole chapter of my 2010 book to the English breakfast. It's totally unknown in 2182! It'll cause a riot when the details are published! And runaway sales!!

JAMIE It's still not healthy – especially all the time. I want my wife fit and healthy.

ALTARA (HELPS SET TABLE) I shall always equate 21<sup>st</sup> century marriage with full English breakfasts. Licensed intimacy on a killer diet!

JAMIE Juice too?

ALTARA Sure! That pomegranate stuff is amazing! Did I tell you the pomegranate is extinct in 2182?

JAMIE You did! Over-intensive farming weakening the strain or something?

ALTARA Exactly! In fact remind me to remind you to put some seeds in your letter to me. Maybe we can introduce it before I get here!

JAMIE Worth a try, I guess.

ALTARA (CLASPING HIM) Tell me, Jamie darling – darling Jamie – golly! (I do love that word) – you are just such a fantastic lover! Has anyone ever told you that?

JAMIE Well, modesty prevents me from – no it doesn't! Yes! Very definitely. Yes! I do have a quite excellent reputation in this particular area of activity. Hundreds of testimonials!

ALTARA I don't want to know that! What I really want to know though is do married people – spouses – or is it spice? – do they always have a double bed like that?

JAMIE Well, yes, of course! To begin with anyway!

ALTARA (SITS AT TABLE) It's wonderful! It's such an inviting environment. We only have Intimacy Pods. You rent them for an hour when you have an Approved Intimacy Partner lined up and a Scheduled Window allocated. But you can spend a whole day in that wonderful bed doing exactly what you want when you want. It's just so – indescribable! Wicked! Golly!

JAMIE (SITS, BREAKFAST) Well long may it continue! And it seems to me it just might continue. It's at least a month since those men followed you here, so maybe your Uncle's department has relaxed a bit?

ALTARA Yes, but that's no time at all for us. Just a setting. We'd better still be careful. It's probably Uncle Tetro's doing – not being able to set the controls up properly!

JAMIE Which was why he turned up three years ago?

ALTARA That's him all over!

JAMIE Anyway - I think it's safe enough for me to start going out to work during the day, don't you?

ALTARA Work?

JAMIE I need to get a part-time job, you know. I want us both to enjoy our married life together – and that takes a bit more than my technical writing currently brings in.

ALTARA No! No way! You stay right here with me – within easy reach of that enormous bed!

JAMIE But -!

ALTARA No buts! You're an inventor!

JAMIE No I'm not!

ALTARA Believe me, darling – you are! A very famous inventor.

JAMIE You're joking! I couldn't invent my way out of a paper-bag.

ALTARA Why would you want to do that?

JAMIE Ah – figure of speech!

ALTARA Oh – well, anyway – one reason I'm here, I reckon, is to show you exactly what you need to invent.

JAMIE Show me!

ALTARA Yes, of course.

JAMIE But you can't do that! Just come swanning back through the mists of time and show me things to invent! That's – cheating! Absolutely unethical!

ALTARA Well of course it isn't! Golly Jamie, just think a moment – how on earth can I learn about these things at school and be a part of a society that makes extensive use of your inventions every day if you don't invent them in the first place??! Come on – imagine what a disaster that would be!

JAMIE Would it?

ALTARA Of course it would! And anyway - Leonardo got the credit for thinking of parachutes and submarines first, didn't he?

JAMIE Er yes, I suppose so.

ALTARA Well who do you think told him about them in the first place?

JAMIE Who?

ALTARA Well, you wouldn't know him - a smarmy Italian historian. Yuck, what a creep. He seriously anachronized Renaissance history! (SEEING OUT OF WINDOW) Oh dear!

JAMIE What do you mean, "Oh dear"?

A WHITE FLAG ON A STICK APPEARS FROM OFFSTAGE ON LANE SIDE

ALTARA Uncle Tetro! Oh, no! Oh Jamie, I don't want to see him! Please, send him away! I'm frightened! We're only just beginning, I couldn't –

JAMIE (TO WINDOW) Where is he? Oh yes. Relax darling, it'll be OK. I won't let him spirit you away, trust me! I'll let him in. (OPENS FRONT DOOR)

THUCYDISON (OFF) I'm not armed.

JAMIE It's all right. Come on in.

THUCYDISON (ENTERING TO FRONT DOOR) Ah! Sir James - or is it still Mr Corewell? It's just five minutes since I last spoke to you, but I suppose it must be more like two or three years to you?

JAMIE Yes. And it is still Mr Corewell.

THUCYDISON Well, it's a pleasure to meet you again. By the way, you'll be relieved to hear that the poor – geyser – is alright. It hurt quite a lot of course, but it was nothing serious. Just a broken nose – and we can sort those very efficiently.

JAMIE Poor geyser!?

THUCYDISON The poor geyser you knocked to the ground yesterday..

JAMIE Are you out of your mind - again?

ALTARA No, not yesterday, Uncle. It hasn't happened yet! When are you going to go on a proper History Machine Program Settings Refresher Course? You know it's long overdue!

THUCYDISON Yes, yes, yes – it's the latest upgrades that confuse me – but I get by! It's purely an operational issue and there's usually an assistant around to help me. Anyway – what you're saying is I've come before them not after?

ALTARA Exactly! But thanks to you we can now be ready for them. I'll just have to make sure Jamie is absolutely up to the mark on nose-breaking techniques!

THUCYDISON OCI! Now I've caused the poor geyser's –

JAMIE Guy!

THUCYDISON Guy?

JAMIE Not geyser!

THUCYDISON (NODDING) - poor guy's injuries myself.

ALTARA So go on that course, Uncle Tetro. You're causing a whole trail of anachronisms like this.

JAMIE Come in, professor! And from memory there's nothing I can offer you?

THUCYDISON No thanks – as I just said a few moments ago, we don't do drugs in 2182.

ALTARA Yes there is! (RUSHES TO TABLE, POURS JUICE) You really have to try pomegranate juice! It's amazing!

THUCYDISON (SIPPING CAUTIOUSLY) You're right! Pomegranate? We're missing out big time on this!

ALTARA Now Uncle, sit down and I'll tell you the news. (THUCYDISON SITS) Jamie and I are married. Just last week! I'm now Mrs Corewell. And it's just wonderful!! You've no idea how wonderful! To be in love and share a massive double bed with a fantastic lover just whenever you want!

THUCYDISON Oh, what a disaster! Of course I know your sentimental attachment to this period and its quaint habits – but there's absolutely no need for you to go native!

ALTARA I just love it!

THUCYDISON But you're not thinking it through! The problems you're causing Mr Corewell after you've left!

ALTARA I'm not leaving! Ever!

THUCYDISON There are a huge number of complex rules and regulations that kick in. Presumption of death, proof of desertion, suspicion of murder even - goodness only knows what else. (TO JAMIE) Not my special subject all this, you understand, Mr Corewell.

JAMIE Sure, sure. (BEAT) What is your special subject then?

THUCYDISON Mine? Oh the totally catastrophic and world-shaking events of the early 2050s! Quite enough to occupy the mind of one poor history professor. (TO ALTARA) But the point is he will find it pretty difficult to marry his second wife just because you persuaded him to make you his first.

ALTARA He's not going to marry a second time, are you darling?

JAMIE No, of course not! What an outrageous idea! One beautiful and wacky wife is quite enough for me!

ALTARA (HUGGING HIM) Love you darling! Kiss, kiss, kiss!

JAMIE And I love you, little sugarpuss! Kiss, kiss, kiss!

ALTARA For ever and ever!

JAMIE No other woman in the world could match up to you in a million years.

ALTARA Oh, I believe you, you charming lovely man! Oh, kiss, kiss, kiss!

THUCYDISON Her name is Mary, as I remember – a distinguished and elegant lady of excellent breeding. But now, listen up! This really does have to come to an end. It's not just our department or our Academy that are concerned. News of your unlicensed outage has reached the Government's Federal Research Council! And pressure is being applied on all of us in most unpleasant ways. Threats of funding cuts, yes? Can I spell out any more plainly the urgency of resolving this escapade as soon as possible?!

ALTARA I'm sorry, Uncle, but the plain answer is no! No, no, no! I just don't care–

THUCYDISON But Altara, see reason! The level of anachronisms may be fairly contained for the present, but at any moment a really big one can blow the entire structure of history apart and cause massive upheavals.

ALTARA But you're not doing your job, Uncle! You've not made a thorough check of tracing the timeline from my visit downstream!

THUCYDISON Now just a minute, young woman –

ALTARA I'm serious! Just look at the anachronisms that would happen if I wasn't here! I've checked, so why haven't you?

THUCYDISON What are you talking about?!

ALTARA My visit has always been factored in. We – in 2182 – live daily with the results. We always have done!

THUCYDISON I just don't believe you!

ALTARA It's true! Just check yourself! When you get back, run the timeline from 2010 in Causative Mode with the Cumulation Option on, and you'll see it unfold. Then take the output and show it to your political bosses and, I promise you, they'll get off your back immediately.

THUCYDISON No, that's just a ploy to get me to leave!

ALTARA It's not, honestly! I just can't leave! It would be so damaging.

THUCYDISON Can't?

ALTARA OK – for example – just one example from many, right? My adorable husband invents the standard method of mutating cancer cells into healthy cells by laser micro-surgery.

JAMIE I did that?

ALTARA Yes - you clever old thing, you. Then he went on to perfect the channelling of positive thought waves from the brain directly into a computer memory receptor store - without surgery being necessary! And he invented the data processing procedures necessary to sort it all out into relevant logic sequences the computer could handle!

JAMIE God - I'm brilliant!

ALTARA You are, my darling - you really are. You're really going to deserve your knighthood! So you can see what I'm saying, Uncle Tetro?

THUCYDISON No! Can't say I do. Enlighten me!

ALTARA These are all major inventions. Our lives in 2182 absolutely depend on them. But here and now Jamie has never invented anything! Not even a paper-bag! And he has no plans to invent anything! So put two and two together, Uncle dear!

THUCYDISON Why not do it for me, beloved niece!

ALTARA If I'm not here to show Jamie what to do and how to do it, do you think it's going to happen? No way!!

THUCYDISON I had a nasty feeling you were going to say that!

JAMIE Hey, just a minute – I'm here, yes? And I'm a bright lad. I could invent a few things on a good day. I'm sure I could come up with that lot if I put my mind to it.

ALTARA Jamie, you wouldn't even think of them in the first place. No disrespect, you lovely man – you obviously have the ability to develop all these breakthroughs once you've understood the concepts and the underlying principles. But that will take a lot of time!

THUCYDISON So - your argument is: if we take you back to avoid anachronisms, all that will happen is we'll explode some major ones instead?

ALTARA Exactly!

THUCYDISON Fair enough! I shall put this argument to the authorities. Maybe they will understand its implications.

ALTARA Good! And you will call off your two guard-dogs?

THUCYDISON They are devoted and loyal assistants to my work, Altara dear – unlike some assistants I could name!

ALTARA You'll still call them off?

THUCYDISON I have to say, by a quirk of fate, that their recent visit to you which is a very recent past event to me, would appear to be in the future for you. Mmm – possibly even as much as a month or so! So I would guess that it need not concern you unduly – other than for the pre-ordained nose-breaking act which seems to be firmly set in the historical timeline. But I can't change that visit now.

ALTARA OK, but apart from that - ?

THUCYDISON There will clearly need to be a postponement in bringing you back to -

ALTARA A long one! Not till I'm very, very old!

THUCYDISON - and the situation will need to be monitored very carefully.

ALTARA OK, that's fair enough, I think!

THUCYDISON I would suggest however that you don't start a private pension or plan your retirement.

ALTARA What does that mean?

THUCYDISON I have a strong hunch, my dear – a historian’s inspired hunch, that you have a long history, and maybe some fame, in front of you as an author of historical romances – maybe even what are, here and now, captivatingly called “bodice-rippers”.

ALTARA That is pure guess-work!

THUCYDISON But inspired! You are your mother’s daughter through and through, my dear. Not a natural academic! Fame and fortune lie ahead of you – well into the 23<sup>rd</sup> century if I’m right!

ALTARA Golly! But - I am staying, Uncle – please remember that! Come hell, brimstone and high tide!

THUCYDISON I’m sorry, my dear but -

ALTARA Please persuade them, Uncle Tetro. Jamie goes on inventing all his life. You know that!

THUCYDISON I’m sure he does a lot of it from his own imagination. Anyway - in the meantime, please do take care. It’s like a house of cards – upset one single element and the mess would be disastrous.

ALTARA I will! I do understand these things!

THUCYDISON Just suppose you did something truly awful, like becoming your own progenetrix! Or even worse, mine!!

ALTARA Uncle, you just haven’t done your homework again. We’re both on a collateral branch from Jamie. We’re both descended from his sister Jenny in Australia (INDICATES PHOTOGRAPH IN FRAME) – isn’t she lovely!

THUCYDISON How wonderful – she is indeed! Well, that’s a relief anyway. Well then, what about dying 150 years before you’re born then? Oh well - farewell my dear - and to you too Mr Corewell. I own up to having truly enjoyed meeting you – my own great-great-grand-uncle – younger than me!! – and not just as a camouflaged observer either!

ALTARA OCI Uncle – you’ve shot your mouth off there!

THUCYDISON Oh dear, Altara, I think you’re the one who needs to do a bit more homework. That phrase is seriously “old hat” by 2010. Must try harder, my dear. (IRONIC) So – fare ye well, you little lovey-doves you!

ALTARA Oh yuck!

JAMIE I’ll see you out!

JAMIE LETS THUCYDISON OUT AND SHUTS FRONT DOOR AGAIN. ALTARA FOLLOWS.

ALTARA (ANXIOUS) It’s good, isn’t it?

JAMIE Let’s hope so, my darling. I couldn’t ever manage without you in my life.

ALTARA (HUGS JAMIE) My love! Jamie darling, do married couples ever go back to bed on Sundays?

JAMIE I have a feeling it’s not unknown.

ALTARA (DRAGGING HIM OFF) Wicked!

***Time passes.***

## SCENE 5. ONE MONTH LATER.

ALTARA IS BUSY AT THE COMPUTER, AS JAMIE TAKES A FORM FROM AN ENVELOPE. BOTH DRESSED MORE OR LESS AS AT START, BUT ALTARA'S DRESS IS CORRECTED FOR TODAY.

JAMIE That's the patent for the Anti-carcinogen Laser-gun through already.

ALTARA Good. And these are the final details on the Brainwave-Computer Interface. I've also listed the main algorithms on the Data Sorting Software, but it may be a bit hard to grasp at this stage. Especially the Relevance Tracking Device which is essential to the shedding of all the dross that gets attached to the transfer.

JAMIE Oh dear - it's all happening so quickly. I can't begin to take all this in.

ALTARA I'm sorry about the rush but I just have this awful feeling that time is against us. Isn't that just so ironic, when it's been time that has brought us together in the first place! I've been desperately trying to remember the date on your letter and I just can't. You definitely underlined it – but that's all I can – (HOLDING BACK TEARS)

Oh Jamie, that thing I said – I was so casual about it!! – your first wife deserting you. I've just been – been trying to blank it out and I shouldn't have been so - it has to be me! (SHE CLASPS HIM TIGHTLY) I hate it, really hate it. "Deserted" – it's so awful – and untrue! I'd never, ever, ever – but I have this sick feeling in my stomach that they're going to win. Oh Jamie – if only this moment could last for ever.

JAMIE Me too! And we will try, believe me! They're not taking my wife away from me without having a big fight on their hands.

ALTARA Yes, wife! First wife! That's what the data said. And, you, you boulder, you absolute cad! - Mary! You traitor! How could you?? Men – you really are awful! I always knew it in theory! We learnt it at school. That's why we in our age have successfully bypassed the whole issue.

Anyway! Focus! You must be absolutely on top of all this as soon as you can. It would be a total disaster if you never did invent this.

JAMIE Don't worry, I'll do my best. And I really don't want another wife – you're the best I could ever have!

ALTARA Darling! You're lovely! Men really are so wonderful! And I do so specially want to stay as I think I'm producing a little anachronism all of our own.

JAMIE Pregnant?!

ALTARA I think so. I've never been it before so I'm not totally sure.

JAMIE Of course you are! I know it! Every time the earth moves I just know a little anachronism is on its way.

ALTARA It's a worry though! Uncle Tetro is right. He'll have a fit.

JAMIE I can see the problem! If you have it here - it's my son alright - but it's your son and your great, great grandfather - uncle. But if you have it in your time - it's still my son - but also suddenly becomes my great, great, great grand-nephew or something. It's a nightmare!

ALTARA Never mind all that - are you happy?

FIRST MAN ENTERS GARDEN FROM LANE AND HIDES BEHIND A BUSH.

JAMIE I'm delighted! A little Corewell – you are so clever! Let's celebrate! As soon as I get back from the post office, we'll go up to London for the day - shop, dine - and see a show. I think there's even a new Alan Ayckbourn for you to see. They're getting rarer!

ALTARA Oh, wicked! At last I can compare your real live-in London with the hideous Ancient Ruins that I know. Even with the massive new Dome they've put over them! What a waste of public money!! Anyway I just know the real thing is going to be so much more exciting than Greater Swindon! I'll just finish this and I'll be ready by the time you get back.

ALTARA CONCENTRATES AGAIN ON THE COMPUTER, WHILE JAMIE PICKS UP HIS OUTGOING MAIL AND EXITS INTO GARDEN.

BY THE GATE 1st MAN SUDDENLY APPEARS IN FRONT OF HIM AND TRIES TO GRAB AND PIN HIS UPPER ARMS. BUT JAMIE IS TOO QUICK, DROPS HIS MAIL AND CLASPS BOTH HANDS AS HE RAISES THEM AND SMASHES THEM DOWN ON HIS FACE. 1st MAN DROPS TO HIS KNEES WITH A CRY OF PAIN.

2nd MAN HAS RUSHED ON AND USES A FUTURISTIC STUN-GUN TO JAMIE'S HEAD. HE COLLAPSES, OUT COLD AND THE SECOND MAN LAYS HIM IN THE UNDERGROWTH.

2nd MAN SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY ENTERS THE HOUSE AND USES THE STUN GUN ON THE SURPRISED ALTARA. 1st MAN, STILL IN PAIN, HELPS HIM DRAG HER OFF UP THE LANE.

JAMIE SLOWLY COMES TO, REALIZES WHAT'S HAPPENED, STAGGERS INTO THE HOUSE CALLING "ALTARA! ALTARA!" URGENTLY. A SUDDEN MOMENT OF UTTER HEART-TUGGING DESPAIR, THEN SLOWLY HE ACCEPTS IT'S HOPELESS.

HE SITS SLOWLY, KNOWING HE WILL NEVER SEE HIS WIFE AGAIN. WITH ENORMOUS EFFORT HE REACHES FOR PEN AND PAPER. AND AN ENVELOPE.

HE ADDRESSES THE ENVELOPE.

JAMIE To my great, great grandniece, Miss Altara - Corewell. To be opened by her on her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, 28th May 2178.

HE PUTS THE ENVELOPE TO ONE SIDE AND STARTS ON THE PAPER.

ALTARA'S VOICE (RECORDED) I've been desperately trying to remember the date on your letter and I just can't.

JAMIE 24 September 2010...

ALTARA'S VOICE (RECORDED) You definitely underlined it – but that's all I can –

JAMIE UNDERLINES THE DATE.

JAMIE My dear, darling, wonderful love... (HE LOSES CONTROL) Oh, my beautiful passionate Altara....

FADE TO BLACK. END.

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