

THE HAZARDS OF CAUSAL LOOPS IN TEMPORAL RESEARCH (ABSTRACT)

A One-Act Play

By

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**Characters:**

TURNER - 60, pudgy, partial to cheesy professorial garb like Cosby sweaters and tweed blazers. A genius that never reached his potential

DAVIES - 30, a former prodigy who had everything going for her until her husband Russ was killed. Now, a bedraggled university professor for whom living is a chore.

RUSS - 35, dead, but before he was dead, he was smart. Not a genius. A regular guy.

SKIMASK - Guy that kills Russ. Wears a skimask.

JAMIE - 21, an assistant.

FUTURE DAVIES - 30, exactly the same as Davies. A twin...yes, this only works if you cast twins, but it'll be sooo cool.

**Time:**

The near past and the near future.

**Place:**

Davies' Lecture Hall, Turner and Davies' shared office, and Davies old office.

(LIGHTS UP on a blackboard on wheels and a desk. On the blackboard, it reads...)

"997 DAYS BEFORE THE FIRST TEST"

(DR. TRACY DAVIES ENTERS mid-lecture. She's one of those professors who paces the room, and the audience is her class.)

DAVIES

Following the second round of the Cern/Gran Sasso experiments, the neutrino pulses were shortened from ten microseconds to three nanoseconds. This reduced the margin of error drastically and the particles still appeared to be arriving prior to the time they were sent. This did not disprove the assertion of faster than light particles. That happened when--

(DAVIES' wristwatch ALARM goes off. )

DAVIES

Ethics, Sophistry and the Alternate Universe, remaining chapters for next time.

TURNER (O.S.)

Ving Kuda. Heavy stuff, Doctor Davies.

DAVIES

Ving's a friend. I'm good for a few hundred book sales a year. You are not a student here.

(Out of the gallery (front row of the audience) steps DR. NATHAN TURNER . )

TURNER

How can you tell?

DAVIES

I ran out of scotch one night last week and memorized the University facebook.

TURNER

I was kidding.

DAVIES

I was bored.

TURNER

Why wouldn't you spend that time rewriting the laws of physics? That seemed to be the career path you were on until last year, when--

DAVIES

--Who the actual fuck are you?

TURNER

Doctor Turner from the University of--

DAVIES

--Nathan Turner?

TURNER

Yes.

DAVIES

The same Nathan Turner that's been pestering with e-mails, snail mails, and voice mails for going on four years now.

TURNER

You never returned any of them.

DAVIES

No shit.

TURNER

I just think it's a waste that you spend your days, droning off lectures on what - to you - must be physics for kindergartners and forcing your students by Ving Kuda's books.

DAVIES

A waste? You want to see a waste? Go to the cemetery down at the end of York Road and find my husband. That's a waste.

TURNER

That's a tragedy. I'm sorry.

DAVIES

Why are you sorry?

(TURNER lets it hang there before utterly ignoring it.)

TURNER

Hawking. Einstein. Feynmann. Tracy Davies. You could not only have stood with them, you could rise so far above them. The youngest doctorate ever to come out of Cambridge--

DAVIES

Why are you forcing me to listen to my own resume.

TURNER

Because you're not like me. You're still young. You're not locked into the box you've built around your brain like me. And that's not mentioning that you're walking around with a .50 Caliber brain in a .22 Caliber world.

DAVIES

You'll understand if I'm repulsed by that metaphor.

TURNER

I'm sorry for that. It was thoughtless. I stole it from a TV show anyway. It's just that - all the greatest theoretical work was done by a great mind unencumbered by experience . What I had once. What you have now.

(TURNER erases the board and writes down three numbers. 26. 27. 28.)

TURNER

Einstein was 26 when he came up with the theory of relativity. Newton was 27 when his work on laws of gravitation earned him the Lucasian chair. Hawking was 28 when he came up with his first singularity theorems. I feel my best work is behind me. The mind is not as elastic anymore. Yours is. Please, don't waste it.

(TURNER erases the numbers.)

TURNER

Join me in my research. I've been working on this my entire adult career, published papers - perhaps even - a couple you may have read. I was at Cern when they fired those first neutrinos to Italy.

DAVIES

Your research?

TURNER

Yes.

DAVIES

Time travel research, wasn't it?

TURNER

Yes.

DAVIES

Yeah. Get the fuck out.

TURNER

I'm prepared to beat your salary here. I have access to time at particle accelerators around the world and it's got to be better than being a lecture-bot.

DAVIES

I'm going to kick your ass so hard, that young Mrs. Turner's uterus will feel like a speed bag. How's that for faster-than-light informational transport?

TURNER

You've got probably the only mind in the world that can crack it and you've got the most to gain by it.

DAVIES

What's that?

TURNER

Your husband.

(That hit her, so much so that TURNER gives her a moment for the shockwave to dissipate. He also steps back.)

TURNER

You can stop that bullet. You can stop it from ever being fired.

DAVIES

No, I can't.

TURNER

You can. Between the two of us, we can unlock it.

DAVIES

No, we can't. And I already proved it.

TURNER

How?

DAVIES

It's November 23, at a quarter after six. If we're successful, then a ping-pong ball will find it's way into this room right now. A ping-pong ball with my signature on it. Out of nowhere, in someone's hand. Someway. Right now.

(Dead quiet. TURNER looks around eagerly.)

DAVIES

Time can't be rewritten.

TURNER

Which means somewhere in here is a ping-pong ball.

(TURNER gets really into looking for it, exerting himself - crouching, getting on his hands and knees. He is so certain it's there.)

DAVIES

Get up.

(TURNER stops, but he keep glancing around.)

DAVIES

Time. Cannot. Be rewritten.

TURNER

Unless it can. We don't know until we try. And that's all I'm asking for - is for you to try. Besides, don't we get into science to know the things we don't know?

(DAVIES walk to a stage exit and holds her hand out, guiding him through it. He goes to the blackboard instead.)

TURNER

And if you die having spent your life getting nowhere, at least you'll have spent it trying to do something for mankind - for yourself and for your husband - not for Ving Kuda's bank account.

(TURNER takes up some chalk and writes his phone number on the board.)

TURNER

I'm just going to put my number here. Call it.

(Chalk down.)

TURNER

Or erase it and It'll be like it never happened.

(TURNER walks off stage.)

TURNER (O.S.)

I have to have my budget in by next Friday. Tock tick.

(DAVIES moves the blackboard around, putting herself and the desk behind it. The backside is revealed to read...)

"THE DAY BEFORE THE FIRST TEST"

(TURNER reenters, wearing a blazer and carrying a scotch bottle and two glasses.)

TURNER

Tracy, seriously, relax. The test chamber is built, the accelerator is calibrated, the tachyon encloakment is going to work. By this time tomorrow, our Nobel Prize is in the bag.

DAVIES

Don't forget our deal.

TURNER

No. Nobody knows about it until we each get our trip to the past.

(TURNER sets down the bottle and glasses and waits. She's still scratching out something in chalk.)

TURNER

I'm still waiting for guys in sunglasses and earpieces to just swoop in here and y'know.

DAVIES

Uh-huh.

(TURNER moves the blackboard aside to reveal that DAVIES is now ponytail'd, wearing glasses, and ditched the cardigan to reveal something a little more colorful.)

TURNER

Thirty-year-old Glen Livet. And...



(TURNER takes a ping-pong ball out of one of the glasses.)

DAVIES

Scotch pong?

TURNER

You don't remember? From that day I showed up in your lecture hall?

(TURNER tosses her the ping-pong ball.)

DAVIES

I may have been a little drunk that day.

TURNER

You were drunk?

DAVIES

Don't complain, its probably the only reason I'm here. I doubt a sober me would have quit her job that day.

TURNER

So the test object...?

(TURNER pours two glasses of scotch.)

DAVIES

Oh, right! The ping-pong-- I remember now. No, that's stupid. Video camera, otherwise we don't know where it's been.

(DAVIES tosses the ping-pong ball away. TURNER puts a glass of scotch in that hand. She wastes little time drinking it.)

TURNER

Guess we know why that didn't happen.

DAVIES

Have you decided what your "voyage to the past" is going to be?

TURNER

I wanted something biblical - something that would prove or disprove the existence of God, but there's no exact date for parting the Red Sea, so I'm going with July 8, 1947.

DAVIES

Roswell.

TURNER

I'll be out there in the rocks waiting for it and I'll know first hand if it was a UFO or a weather balloon.

DAVIES

That doesn't really seem like you. It seems like you just picked a history mystery out of a hat.

TURNER

Where do you think I would go?

DAVIES

I don't think you care about going anywhere.

(DAVIES drinks her scotch and turns her attention back to the blackboard.

TURNER sets his down.)

DAVIES

You've never asked me.

TURNER

I figured I didn't need to.

DAVIES

The day he died.

TURNER

The Novikov Self-Consistency Theory says you won't be able to save him. Anything that happened in the past, happened in the past. Anything you do in the past is already factored in.

DAVIES

Theories are there to be disproved.

TURNER

How does the universe abide a paradox?

DAVIES

I stop the murder and when the tachyon encloakment wears off, I return to a world where we didn't do this and Russ never died. There might even be two of me.

TURNER

What then?

DAVIES

Doesn't matter. Russ lives. Even if I can't be with him because I'm - you know - already with him. Doesn't matter. Russ lives.

TURNER

What if Novikov is right. Have you prepared yourself for that?

DAVIES

The gunman was never caught.

TURNER

So you'll ID him? Come back and see to it he gets--

DAVIES

No. I'm going to kill him. I'm going to shoot him in the gut. While he bleeds out I'm going to explain that the slow, painful death he's experiencing is merciful compared to what he's done to me. How I've felt like the life has been slowly sucking out of me for years. How I've spent all this time - these last three years - throwing my head against a wall to do the impossible, how I've been taking whatever I can get my hands on so I can stay awake for twenty-plus hours a day to achieve the impossible and once I have - if I can't have Russ back - then he should consider himself lucky he actually dies at the end of it. And when I'm done whispering that in his ear, I'm going to dump him in the foundation of the Brainerd building - it was just going up then - and I'm going to cover him a meter of dirt. And if he's not dead before the first shovelful hits his face - he'll still be luckier than he deserves.

TURNER

And no one will ever know what became of him. Lost to time.

DAVIES

Novikov stands up. What I will do, I've already done, and maybe I'll hurt a little bit less.

TURNER

Or the universe self-regulates and something stops you from stopping it.

DAVIES

Like my gun jams or--

TURNER

Exactly like your-- You have a gun?

DAVIES

I'm doing this. Since that first day - I'm doing this. Why are you doing this? It's not to go time tourist to Roswell.

TURNER

No, that's just me being a dork. My reasons are not so noble as yours. Which has probably got something to do with why I didn't get anywhere for thirty years until I got you on board.

DAVIES

To be the guy that invented time travel.

TURNER

I was a scientist once. I wanted to know the unknowable. I wanted to understand the universe better. And the universe dodged me. It felt like. Then dodging became mocking. When I started out, they said I was going to be the next Einstein. I could have just been a physicist - maybe I'd discover a particle, but no - I had to be the next big thing, so I went after the biggest thing in all of science. The next Einstein - you can't put that in somebody's head. It has to be lived up to.

DAVIES

You put it into mine, didn't you? I remember that much.

TURNER

I did it to get what I wanted. I'm sorry.

DAVIES

You'll do anything to get what you want?

TURNER

When you've had this idea of who you're supposed to be for so long, you can't let go of it. I want to die a Stephen Hawking. Not an Alexander Spornau.

DAVIES

Who?

TURNER

Exactly.

DAVIES

If it doesn't work tomorrow?

TURNER

It's going to work.

DAVIES

If it doesn't?

TURNER

It will.

DAVIES

You really expected to find that ping-pong ball that day, didn't you?

TURNER

I did.

(JAMIE, (a student assistant) enters, stage right.)

DAVIES

In three years I've never seen you bend at the waist, let alone get down--

TURNER

--Yeah, yeah. I guess we know why it didn't happen now.

DAVIES

Not because it didn't work.

TURNER

No. Because if it didn't work, I'd eat your gun.

(to Assistant)

What is it, Jamie?

JAMIE

Accelerator prep team called and confirmed the configurations, all systems are go.

DAVIES

Thank you, Jamie. Good night.

(JAMIE exits, stage right.)

TURNER

I gotta pee.

(TURNER exits stage left. DAVIES takes out a cell and dials...)

DAVIES

This is Doctor Davies, I just got word that all the systems are configured. It's all set then? It could run right now if we needed to? Yeah, we need to. I'll be there in twenty.

(DAVIES unlocks the desk, takes out a gun and puts it in her purse. She exits stage right.)

(TURNER reenters stage left. Looks around.)

TURNER

Tracy?

(TURNER Shrugs. Turns the blackboard around revealing...)

"1,488 DAYS BEFORE THE FIRST TEST"

(TURNER leaves the stage for reset of the scene. Now, several years prior to the previous scene. DAVIES reenters behind the blackboard, with a another new look, even more color, and starts writing. RUSS enters behind the blackboard and emerges, checking his watch.)

RUSS

We're going to be late.

(DAVIES pokes her head out.)

DAVIES

Not very late.

RUSS

You know, most husbands have to put up with their wives changing their dress five times or doing their hair--

(--Pokes her head out again.)

DAVIES

That's not at all sexist of you.

RUSS

"So sorry we're an hour late, my wife was just taking a crack at Unified Field Theory."

(SKIMASK enters stage left and stays there, pointing a gun at Russ.)

SKIMASK

Put your hands up and don't move.

(Russ sees the gun and raises his hands.)

DAVIES

Russ, who is that?

(SKIMASK is taken aback by DAVIES' voice. He didn't expect her to be there.)

RUSS

I don't know.

SKIMASK

(to DAVIES)

Stay where you are.

(DAVIES steps out from behind the blackboard and drops her chalk when she sees the gun.)

DAVIES

Jesus on a Jetpack.

SKIMASK

I told you not to-- I told you to stay there.

(DAVIES is starting to lose her shit - hyperventilating.)

DAVIES

Ohmigod. What do you want from us. Please, don't hurt us. We haven't done-- We haven't--

(She's gasping for air. Russ takes an instinctive step toward her.)

SKIMASK

I said don't move.

(He takes the step back.)

RUSS

She can't breathe, asshole.

(DAVIES feels herself about to go down and lowers herself at the side of the desk.)

DAVIES

Please, don't...

(DAVIES passes out. It's all Russ can do to not go to her.)

SKIMASK

Make sure she's alright.

What? RUSS

Fucking do it. SKIMASK

(Russ rushes to DAVIES side, listens to her chest.)

She's breathing. She just passed out. RUSS

Then get back. Keep the hands up. SKIMASK

(Russ stands and steps away from DAVIES. Nothing happens for several beats.)

Is there something you-- RUSS

--Just don't talk. Don't move and don't talk. SKIMASK

(Several more awkward beats before...)

I have money if that's what-- RUSS

It's not. SKIMASK

Then what are you going to do? Are you going to kill me? RUSS

I don't know. I was going to, but now that I'm actually here, I don't know if I can. I'm having a kind of Heisenbergian moment here. SKIMASK

You're having what-now? RUSS

You're married to a Nobel Prize winner, I'd think you'd pick up some basic shit like the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. SKIMASK

(Russ notices FUTURE DAVIES rush in behind SKIMASK, carrying a gun herself.)



RUSS  
What the hell...?

SKIMASK  
The act of observing something changes that something.

FUTURE DAVIES  
Nathan?

(SKIMASK turns around to find FUTURE DAVIES pointing a gun at him.)

FUTURE DAVIES  
Take the mask off, Nathan.

SKIMASK  
How do you know--

FUTURE DAVIES  
I've been hearing that annoying Goddamn voice everyday for three years, take the fucking mask off, Nathan.

(He does.)

SKIMASK/TURNER  
So it worked?

FUTURE DAVIES  
Yeah. Your whole sick little plan worked.

(TURNER nods and without even looking back at Russ, shoots him.)

FUTURE DAVIES  
No!

(Squeezes the trigger - JAMMED. Again. Nothing - over and over again.)

TURNER  
You said I'm alive in the future. You can't kill me. A causal loop has already been established.

(TURNER turns the gun on her. He backs away from her.)

TURNER  
I am sorry, but, his dying led to-- will lead to the greatest achievement in the history of mankind.

FUTURE DAVIES  
If I thought for a second it was about that...

(TURNER pauses.)

TURNER

What?

FUTURE DAVIES

I'll tell you in four years.

(TURNER dashes behind the blackboard. He brings the blackboard around to the front of the stage (allowing the scene to set behind it) revealing...)

"TODAY - THE FIRST TEST"

(TURNER comes around the front of the blackboard and pushes it upstage. He erases the words. DAVIES enters behind him. He knows she's there.)

TURNER

Jamie called. Told me you went to the accelerator last night.  
(turns around)  
I thought I had a few more days. I didn't think you wouldn't even wait for the test.

DAVIES

So you could - what - run off and hide in Micronesia for the rest of your life?

TURNER

It was actually on the list, but no. I decided to just ride it out.

DAVIES

What the fuck do you mean "ride it out?"

TURNER

Pay the price. All the greatest inventions have come with a cost. I'm prepared to pay it, because whatever I've done - I invented time travel. You think if a Nazi scientist cured cancer he would be forgotten? He wouldn't. People might be bittersweet about their survival, but they'll secretly be thanking that name for their lives. I have that now. I'll pay the price for what got me there. You're going to turn me in?

DAVIES

It's on the list.

TURNER

It's not going to get you what you want. There were no witnesses. You're on the record as having passed out. The murder weapon doesn't even exist anymore.

It was excruciatingly well-planned. My name might be tainted some, but it wouldn't even go to trial.

DAVIES

There's other options on the list.

TURNER

Killing me?

DAVIES

Number one spot.

TURNER

This isn't your plan. This isn't the plan you've had for three years. This is extemporaneous. It's sloppy. You'll get caught.

DAVIES

I'm not you. I don't need months to plan the perfect crime.

TURNER

You don't?

(FUTURE DAVIES (*this one only a few hours older than the other one*) steps in from opposite Davies - surrounding Turner. And FUTURE DAVIES has a gun.)

FUTURE DAVIES

No. I just need a time machine.

DAVIES

Open your mouth.

(He hesitates.)

FUTURE DAVIES

Do it.

(He opens his mouth and she inserts the barrel.)

DAVIES

I'm going to walk out the front door, into the quad which is filled with students and faculty. I'll be right in the middle of all of them when that gun goes off. And where will I be going. To get in the accelerator and be her.

(Gestures to FUTURE DAVIES.)

TURNER  
(barrel in mouth)

Why would I?

DAVIES

What?

(FUTURE DAVIES removes the gun from his mouth.)

TURNER  
I just invented time travel. I'm a part of history. Why would I kill myself?

DAVIES  
Because you utterly failed to invent time travel.

FUTURE DAVIES  
The event horizon lasts for a nanosecond.

DAVIES  
I returned to the present the same second I left. To the untrained eye - nothing happened.

FUTURE DAVIES  
You know who witnessed my little trip?

DAVIES  
Nothing but untrained eyes.

FUTURE DAVIES  
And when I get back, there will be a catastrophic computer failure. All the data will be wiped.

DAVIES  
The experiment will be a failure.

FUTURE DAVIES  
You will be a failure.

DAVIES  
You know how history records failures?

TURNER  
It doesn't.

FUTURE DAVIES

And what happens to the name of the man who failed?

TURNER

Lost to time.

DAVIES

Bye, Nathan.

TURNER

Can I tell you one thing? Your actions in the past were factored in. I may have pulled the trigger, but I didn't kill him. I couldn't do it. I couldn't kill him for something that might not work. I was going to leave. If you hadn't...

(DAVIES and FUTURE DAVIES look to each other.)

(LIGHTS DOWN.)

(GUNSHOT.)