

Time for Turkey by Lesley L. Smith

When I came to, I was lying on the ground on some very uncomfortable electrical components.

"Dr. Phillips! Kelly! Are you all right?" Justin, my research assistant, asked. "Should I call an ambulance? Should I call your husband?"

"I'm not sure. What's going on?" I sat up.

"We were doing a fusion experiment with the Tokomak, I stepped out of the room for a moment, and then the magnetic field and energy measurements went off the charts. And then there was some kind of overload. Remember?" He peered into my eyes. "Are you okay?"

"I don't remember, but I think I'm all right." I stood up. "No broken bones, anyway."

Our boss David ran into the room. "I heard a crash. What happened? Is anyone injured?"

I sat on a lab stool. "I think we're fine, right, Justin? You're okay aren't you?"

He nodded.

"I don't know what happened," I said. "I don't remember."

"It's almost noon, why don't you call it quits for the day?" David said.

"That sounds good. I do feel kind of ...strange."

"And just stay home Thursday and Friday and rest up."

I was touched. It wasn't like David to give us time off.

Justin snorted. "Don't we have tomorrow and Friday off anyway for Thanksgiving?"

"Yes, technically," David said. "But if you were thinking of coming in this weekend and working, don't. Take time off. Rest. Relax. You can fix this mess next week."

"Gee, thanks," I said to his retreating back.

"You're welcome," he said from the doorway.

"Come to think of it," I said, "I was already going to take this afternoon off." I shook my head. "Jeez."

"Yeah, David's a real prince." Justin sat down next to me. "So, am I still invited for Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow?"

"Are you still bringing pie?"

"Yeah." Justin nodded.

"Then, by all means, come on over." I smiled.

It was just as well I had the afternoon off because I had a lot of cooking to do. I grabbed my stack of recipes and notes from the kitchen desk and sat down at the breakfast bar. Thank goodness, I'd made a menu and schedule and shopped earlier in the week.

I inspected the elaborate schedule. Shoot! It was almost 12:30; I was already behind. I was supposed to have started soaking the dried apricots in orange juice for the cranberry sauce, and then put together the turkey marinade. I hadn't done anything and the schedule was already screwed up.

If only I'd gotten home a little earlier. I felt kind of queasy.

Our grandfather clock in the hall struck twelve.

I looked up at it. "That's weird. How did it get so behind?" I glanced at my watch. Wait a minute, it's only noon. I could have sworn it was later than that, but shook my head and got to work.

I worked non-stop for about a half-hour, when I felt queasy again. I realized I forgot to eat lunch.

The clock struck one o'clock.

Weird. I could have sworn it was about 12:30. I glanced at my watch. Nope, it was 1:00.

I fixed a sandwich and got some milk and sat down at the breakfast bar to eat. Taking a bite, I noticed the message light was blinking on the answering machine. I pressed the button.

It was Bill. "Where are you Kelly? I thought you were cooking today. Pick up if you're there." He paused. "Okay, it's a little after 12:30, and I wanted to check to see what you wanted to do for dinner tonight. Your parents are coming, right? Am I stopping for takeout on my way home? Call me back when you get this."

I quickly finished my sandwich and called Bill back a few minutes after 1:00. Unfortunately I got his secretary and she said he was in meeting for the rest of the day. Darn it. I wish I'd gotten his call earlier.

I felt kind of sick--that'll teach me to eat so fast.

The phone rang. I quickly scooped it up.

It was Bill. "Hey, Kelly. How's the cooking going?" he said. I could hear him smile.

"Fine," I said. "I'm glad you called back, but I thought you were in a meeting?"

"I'm about to go to a meeting. But, wait, what do you mean 'call back'?"

"Sorry I missed your call before, I'm not sure what happened.

I was here."

"Hon, what do you mean missed my call?"

I didn't call before. Are you all stressed out about tomorrow? I know you haven't hosted Thanksgiving dinner for your folks before, but I'm sure you'll do great."

I glanced at my watch. It was 12:35. Uh, oh. Something weird was going on.

"Hon? Kelly? Are you there?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah. How important is this meeting of yours? Any chance you can come home?"

"You know it's a very important meeting. Why? Is something wrong?"

"No. Forget it.

Let's get takeout tonight but why don't you come home first, so we can see what everyone wants."

"Okay. But how did you know that's what I was going to ask you?"

"Uh...", I said brilliantly.

"Oops. I need to get to that meeting. Gotta' run. Bye, sweetie."

"Bye." We hung up.

What the hell was going on here? Could I have a concussion?

The weirdness must be related to the accident in the lab this morning. Justin! I stared at the grandfather clock, watching the hands move around, as I called him.

"Hi, Justin. Are you all right? Anything weird going on at your house?"

"Hi, Professor Phillips. Everything's fine. Why?"

"I thought we agreed you'd call me Kelly. I'm not sure, but I think there's some kind of aftereffect from the accident this morning."

Justin didn't answer me.

I watched the hands of the clock go around regularly. "Justin? Are you there?"

"Yeah. I'm just surprised. What kind of aftereffects? Do you need help?"

"I think it might be a good idea if you stopped by my place, if it's okay with you. Do you remember where the house is?"

"Yep. No problem. I'll be right there."

I watched the clock behave perfectly normally until I had to answer the front door. "Hi, Justin. Thanks for coming."

"I got here as fast as I could. What's going on?"

"I'm not sure. Let's go talk in the kitchen," I said. We sat down at the center island.

Then, I caught some movement in my peripheral vision. Someone else was in the kitchen, at the refrigerator! As they closed the door, I saw a middle-aged woman, wearing an outfit just like mine, who looked just like me! It was me!

"Justin! Look!" Pointing at her, I turned back to Justin. He was gone.

The woman's eyes widened and she dropped the jug of milk she was holding. The jug smashed onto the floor, the cap flew off and milk sprayed all over.

"What? Who're you?" she said.

Then I felt queasy.

"Kelly!" Justin stood in the middle kitchen, breathing hard.

When I glanced back at the clock it read five after two. There was dried milk all over the floor. I remembered eating a sandwich at about one o'clock and listening to Bill's message.

But I also remembered seeing a woman, me, sitting at the breakfast bar when I was at the refrigerator and dropped the milk.

"What the hell is going on?" Justin yelled. "You disappeared! And then there was dried milk all over the floor and then you reappeared!"

"I don't know what's going on." My hands started shaking. Calm down, Kelly. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. "How long was I gone?"

Justin looked at his watch. "Thirty minutes."

I thought about what'd happened so far. Apparently I wasn't here when Bill called. But then I was here when he called. And he only called once. I didn't drop the milk and then I dropped the milk. It was like I went back in time. "Could it be time reversal?" Time reversal. That was mind-boggling.

"This is freaky." Justin sat back down. "From the huge energy pulse in the lab? Because of time reversal invariance?" He took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose before looking at me. "I guess? Remind me about time reversal invariance."

I started to relax a little. Maybe all this did make sense. "Time reversal invariance says that events flowing backwards in time are not only theoretically possible but required for the laws of physics to work."

"Wow," he said.

I nodded. "I agree." I tried to breath normally. Something about the phone call was bothering me. The first time I missed it. Why?

"But where did you go when you disappeared?" Justin asked.

"Very good question." We sat there in silence for a few moments, while I willed my pulse to slow down and thought about what had happened.

I think I went back in time a half hour and then time proceeded linearly for thirty minutes. At the end of those thirty minutes...I must have jumped ahead thirty minutes so I was consistent with the original timeline. That's why I missed Bill's call.

"The evidence seems to show I traveled thirty minutes into the past--more than once. But then maybe I had to skip over some time to get back in sync with my original timeline. Does that make sense?"

"I guess it makes as much sense as any of this," Justin said.

We looked at each other for a few moments.

"It is pretty weird," I said. "But, actually..." I reviewed the events of the afternoon again. "I may have done it on purpose--although at the time I wasn't aware of what I was doing."

"What do you want to do now? Do you want to do some kind of experiment?" Justin smiled for the first time this afternoon.

I sighed, taking in the sticky floor, thinking about my kids on their way home from school, and my folks flying in for the holiday.

"I'd like nothing better. But unless you feel like babysitting, cleaning, or cooking...."

Justin shook his head. "No, thanks."

"Then there won't be any experiments today. Right now I needed to clean the floor and try and finish my afternoon chores."

Thursday morning I got up at the crack of dawn, put the turkey in the oven and went back to bed.

After we had breakfast and got dressed, I put Nick and Emma in charge of setting the table, with Bill's help. Bill and my Dad started watching football. My Mom volunteered to help with the cooking. It was a kind offer, but I knew from experience she was more of a chief than an Indian. As far as I was concerned, the only plus to hosting Thanksgiving was you got to do it the way you wanted.

"Noon seems early to eat dinner," Mom said, sitting at the breakfast bar. "Our family tradition is to eat later, like at four or five o'clock."

"Thank you for your input. The guests will expect to eat at noon. The turkey is cooking and it will be ready at noon."

"Kelly, honey, then we won't be eating at noon. It has to rest and be carved. Your Dad would be happy to carve the bird, by the way."

"Sorry I wasn't clear. It will be done cooking at 11:30."

She frowned.

I knew she was unhappy about her 'demotion' to helper after many years of being hostess. "Let me get you some more coffee, Ma." I put my arm around her shoulders. "And why don't you tell me what you've been up to?"

I really tried to be patient but after another hour of being told I was doing everything wrong, I was on the verge of screaming.

The doorbell rang.

Saved by the bell. "Mom, that'll be the guests arriving. Can you please look after them? Bill's probably too engrossed in the game."

"Of course, honey. I'm glad to help with whatever." She went into the family room.

Just when I thought I'd finally be able to work in peace, the kitchen door opened.

"Hey, Profess, er, Kelly. Here's my pie."

"Thanks, Justin." I put it on the counter.

"Have you done any more time traveling?" he asked with a smile.

"No. I've been too busy." I smiled back at him.

"So, do you need any help cooking or anything?" he asked.

"No. Thanks anyway. Although if I disappear for...."

"Thirty minutes?" Justin grinned.

"Yes. If I disappear can you cover for me?"

He nodded. "I think I can handle that."

"You go watch the game. I know you want to. Go on." I shoed him out and then breathed a sigh of relief; I had an hour until dinner. It was crunch time and I would be more efficient on my own. I whirled around the kitchen, finishing off the salad, getting the yams and potatoes ready to go into the microwave, getting out serving plates and spoons.

The oven timer pinged. It must be the turkey. Carefully I opened the door and peeked in. The thermometer had popped; it was over 170 degrees. The bird was a juicy, golden brown and smelled delicious. That orange juice-bourbon marinade was a winner. I turned off the oven, got out the oven mitts, opened the oven door and reached in. Gingerly, I picked up the pan. It was heavier than I remembered. And the aluminum pan was bending....

The turkey fell right out of the pan and onto the floor.

"Oh my God!"

I felt nauseated and then it was 11:05. Thank God.

Past-Kelly didn't seem that surprised to see me. "Hi. I wondered if I'd see you today."

"Let's just say there was a mishap taking the turkey out of the oven."

Past-Kelly gasped. "Oh, no."

"Together, I think the two of us should be able to avert it."

"But if you're here now, doesn't that mean neither of us will be here from about 11:30 to noon?"

I nodded. "The two of us will just have to finish everything before the turkey comes out of the oven."

We worked great together, go figure. We were ready and waiting with oven mitts at 11:25 to take the turkey out of the oven. I cracked the door. The thermometer had popped.

"Isn't it too early?" Past-Kelly asked.

"Nope, it looks good. Get over here. This pan is flimsy."

Very, very carefully we took the turkey out of the oven and set it on the counter.

"Phew." I took off my mitts and rubbed my forehead.

And then it was noon and I was in the kitchen.

Mom walked in. "Oh, there you are. Come on, we're ready to start."

I followed her into the dining room. The table looked great with colorful fall leaves and candles. It was piled high with food. Best of all it was surrounded by my favorite people in the world.

Bill stepped over and handed me a glass of wine. "A toast to the cook."

We all held our glasses up. "To the cook!"

"It looks great, honey," Mom said. "You pulled out all the stops."

I smiled mysteriously. "You have no idea."

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