SEQUEL TO THE AWARD-WINNING **RUNNING BEHIND TIME**



JAN TURK PETRIE

PLAY FOR TIME



Play for Time

By

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Too Many Heroes

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The Truth in a Lie

Running Behind Time

Still Life with a Vengeance

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“People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”

Albert Einstein

A reminder of the story so far

In 2020, Tom Brookes is partway through a train journey from Cheltenham to Paddington when he accidentally slips through a time portal and ends up in 1982. Reaching Paddington, he's horrified to discover what's happened. He makes the return journey hoping to get back to his own time and bumps into Beth Sawyer. In the darkness of the tunnel, she grabs his arm as he goes back through the portal and finds herself thrown into the midst of the 2020 Covid pandemic.

Beth is slow to accept the reality of her new situation. Tom wants to help her to get back to 1982, but the crucial train – the Gustav Holst – is unable to make the return journey due to a landslip. Since her time leap has left her with no money or resources, Tom persuades his mother, Lana, to let her stay in their cottage in the Cotswold village of Stoatsfield-under-Ridge.

Though they come from very different eras, Tom and Beth begin to develop feelings for each other. Tom thinks up a plan for them both to make money on Beth's return to her own time. After some internet searches, he lists the winners of various sporting events in 1982/83 along with future high yield share investments.

Discovering the landslip has been cleared, Beth and Tom board the distinctive train intending to make the leap back in time together. They end up in early 1983. On the journey Tom begins to suspect they're being observed. Once they reach Paddington, Beth goes off to phone her aunty while Tom is confronted by Ford and others calling themselves Guardians. They make it clear they intend to force him to return to his own time.

Through subterfuge he manages to break free and flees with Beth before they can stop him. Having "lost" several months of her life, Beth has also lost her acting job and her flat share.

The couple book into a cheap hotel and, despite the circumstances, spend a passionate night together. Before they can enact any of their future plans, the Guardians catch up with them and force Tom onto the return train and back through the time portal to 2020. During the journey Ford inadvertently reveals Tom is able to time travel because there is something special about him. Heartbroken at his forced separation from Beth, he arrives back in Cheltenham and his own time.

Meanwhile, in 1983, Beth is reduced to sleeping on the sofa in her old flat. However, armed with the cash Tom acquired and the list of winners he gave her, she begins to make money betting on the outcome of various sporting events. Once she's accumulated enough seed money, she hopes to invest in the companies on his list.

All goes well until Beth is shocked to discover she is pregnant with Tom's child. Severe morning sickness prevents her from continuing her money-making activities. Her suspicious flatmate, Rachel, searches Beth's handbag and, on finding lots of unexplained cash, confronts her. Beth is forced to reveal the source of her new-found wealth and hands over the sheet of future betting and investment information. After initial scepticism, Rachel takes over the whole project and is soon making lots of money for herself.

Back in 2020 in Stoatsfield, following a casual chat with the woman serving in the local shop Tom discovers his mother, Lana, has had a very distinctive male visitor. Suspicions aroused, he rushes home to confront her and is astounded when his mother finally reveals her own

extraordinary past. His ability to time travel is inherited from his absentee father – a man he'd previously known only as "Uncle Matt" who is one of the Guardians.

In 1983 Beth finally wakes up without feeling nauseous. It's a sunny spring day and she decides to go for a walk. As if she's being guided, she heads for Hyde Park and then Paddington station where the Gustav Holst is ready to depart.

Tom gets a phone call from his mother when out walking. After a hurried return, he is shocked and delighted to find Beth sitting in the kitchen drinking tea with his mother. When she stands up, he can see she is pregnant. Revealing that he is the father, Beth suggests the baby must have inherited Tom's ability to time-travel and that is how she was able to travel back through the portal.

Though happily reunited, the family face an uncertain future together.

Now read on…

Play for Time

Chapter One

Gloucestershire, England.

August 2020

Beth

The cold goo on her stomach sends a chill through Beth. Lying on her back like a beached seal, she feels utterly powerless. Not the best angle to handle this moment of truth – for better or worse. Her sweaty hand involuntarily curls around the lifeline of her new mobile phone.

The woman draws the now slimy probe back and forth across Beth's enlarged belly. 'To answer your previous question, there's definitely only one baby.' At least that's some relief. Voice muffled by her mask, she adds, 'And certainly a good size.' Filling out the form in reception, the question about dates had made Beth's head spin – her guess a stab in the dark.

She can't see much of the midwife or technician or whatever she is. It's hard to understand why they need to wear quite so much protective gear – it's not as if the thing's about to burst out through her stomach wall like in that alien film.

The whooshing sound of a rapid pulse fills the small room. Beth's ears pulsate in time. The woman angles the screen towards her. Peering up at it, Beth watches a series of indecipherable ever-changing shapes and patterns in monochrome. With all their twenty-first century medical advances, she'd expected it to be colour.

The woman does something which freezes the image on the screen and then draws a circle around what could be a head. If Tom was here, he'd understand what she's doing. Though this is a private clinic and they're paying customers, covid regulations mean he's had to wait outside in the car park.

More than once, Tom has declared, 'I'm quite sure it's a girl' and, given his extraordinary abilities, she believes him. He's already referring to her as Vega – the name of the brightest star in the Summer Triangle of stars. 'Don't forget to film it all,' he'd shouted after her.

Beth asks, 'Is it okay if I record this for my partner?'

She deciphers the series of mumbles into the mask as, 'It's hard for dads. I'm sure we can bend the rules. Go ahead.'

Like Tom had shown her, Beth locates the camera icon and selects the video option. It's a struggle to keep her raised arm steady. 'You said just now that it's a good size – does that mean it's larger than a regular baby would be?'

This produces a frown on the small portion of the woman's face that's visible. 'No, not at all… I'd say everything looks pretty much what we'd expect for your dates.' Gloved hand on the probe, she appears to be measuring the distance between two points. 'Slightly more than average length for this stage of gestation.'

Beth is shocked when a bent leg appears out of the darkness – her baby asserting its presence. Looks like she's trying to kick the probe out of the way. Leave me alone, I'm sleeping.

'Correct number of toes on both feet.'

‘But why is the heart beating so fast? Is this scaring her?’

Smile in her voice, the woman says, ‘A baby’s heart rate is always relatively fast – normally between 110 and 160 beats per minute. It can also vary a lot. Nothing to be alarmed about, I assure you.’

On the screen a shape recognisable as a face briefly emerges. Such a serene expression. Wow!

‘Although there are no guarantees, your baby appears to be normal in every way.’

Staring at the screen, Beth sees movement – a perfect little arm materialises to scratch the profile of its face. Tiny chin jutting out. Little pert nose as clear as anything. A huge relief given that the baby’s grandfather is a Guardian and at best they only resemble humans. She’d watched Rosemary’s Baby late one night so is glad there’s been no mention of a tail. And no sign of horns. She can’t tell if there’s anything wrong with its eyes – they appear to be closed.

‘Would you like to know the sex of your baby?’

Beth’s tempted to tell her she already does. Instead, she asks, ‘Can you tell that for certain?’

‘Not always, but in this case, I’d say it’s very clear.’ The woman holds her head to one side. ‘These days, expectant mothers – or I should say *people* – can get a bit prickly about gender.’ In a rehearsed way she adds, ‘We simply offer to identify your baby’s current biological sex for those parents who consider that to be significant.’

Beth feels a strong flutter. Simultaneously the onscreen image reveals the individual bones making up a kicking foot. It spurs her on. ‘Yes – I think I would like to know.’

‘You’re quite sure?’

She nods. ‘Yes – I’m sure.’

‘Then congratulations, you’re having a little boy.’

‘Really? I mean you’re absolutely one hundred percent certain about that?’

The woman freezes the screen. ‘Pretty unmistakable I’d say.’

She’s right.

The picture jumps back to real time. Now the angle has changed; the baby’s moved away from the probe as if he’s annoyed to have his private parts openly discussed.

‘I’ll see if I can get a close up of his face for your partner,’ she says. A quick adjustment and then satisfied the woman stands back, arms folded.

And there he is filling the screen – her son. Their son. So much for Tom’s psychic powers. Hi there. Raising a hand, she waves at him.

‘Will you look at that.’ The woman chortles. ‘If I didn’t know better, I’d say he’s waving right back at you.’

All too soon the screen goes blank. The woman hands her tissues to wipe the goo off her belly. Once that’s done, she pulls her top down and heaves herself off the bed.

One thing’s for certain, there’s no way she’s going to call their son Vega. Far better to give him a common name, though that’s bound to have changed since her time – back in the early eighties.