

THE TIME TRAVELER'S PARADOX

by
WILMA SHAKESPEARE

FADE IN:

EXT. STARLIGHT DINER - NIGHT

In HARD RAIN and SOFT FOG, a neon sign buzzes.

INT. STARLIGHT DINER - NIGHT

Rain lashes against the glass. Heavy, unrelenting.

A sleepy, late-night haven with a couple patrons.

ASHLYN (20s) sits in a booth, staring at her phone. A text: *"Are you coming to the party or what?"*

She types back an angry face emoji: "On my way."

A shadow falls over the table. Ashlyn looks up.

ASHLYN 2 (30s), her exact replicant. Same hair, face, eyes rimmed with dark circles. She looks bone-tired.

Ashlyn blinks, forcing a nervous smile.

ASHLYN

Wow. Okay. They really weren't kidding about the universal twin thing.

ASHLYN 2

Can I sit?

ASHLYN

Uh, yeah. Please. This is wild. I'm Ashlyn.

ASHLYN 2

I know.

Ashlyn 2 slides into the booth across from her.

She stares at Ashlyn, studying her own younger face.

ASHLYN

Is it weird that I feel like I'm looking in a mirror? Where are you from? I'm originally from Chicago, moved here for--

ASHLYN 2

For the graphic design job. You have a birthmark shaped like a crescent moon on your left hip. You still check under the bed for monsters when the closet door is open.

Ashlyn freezes. The smile vanishes. Finally -

ASHLYN

Who the hell are you? Is this a prank?

ASHLYN 2

Look at my hands, Ashlyn.

Ashlyn 2 places her hands on the table. On her left wrist is a thick, jagged white scar.

Ashlyn examines her own bare wrist.

ASHLYN

I don't have that.

ASHLYN 2

Not yet. You get it in three years, trying to clear broken glass out of a prison window.

Ashlyn shrinks back against the booth.

ASHLYN

You're... me. From the future.

ASHLYN 2

The law says everyone has a stranger-twin out there. The time-monitoring bureaus don't flag two identical faces sitting in a diner. It's the perfect camouflage.

ASHLYN

Why are you here?

Ashlyn 2 reaches out, her hand hovering over Ashlyn's, but she stops herself and pulls back.

ASHLYN 2

In exactly ten minutes, you are going to leave this diner. You are going to drive down Oak Street to go to that party.

A long pause, then -

ASHLYN 2

At 11:42 PM, your phone will buzz. You will look down for two seconds to read a text from your ex. In those two seconds, a man named David Collins will step off the curb. You will hit him. You will hear the thud against your bumper. And instead of stopping... you will hit the gas. You will run.

Ashlyn shakes her head in disbelief.

ASHLYN

Seriously? No. I wouldn't do that. I'm a good person.

ASHLYN 2

Panic makes monsters out of good people. You hide the car. You live in agony for two weeks. Then the police knock on your door. David dies. You go to prison for ten years. It destroys Mom. It destroys us.

ASHLYN

(panicking)

Fine! I won't go to the party. I'll stay right here. I'll turn off my phone. Timeline fixed, right? You can go back.

ASHLYN 2

No. The universe requires the event to happen. If David doesn't get hit, the paradox collapses both of our timelines. He has to be hit.

ASHLYN

Then what am I supposed to do?!

She slides a set of car keys across the table.

They are identical to the keys in Ashlyn's hand.

ASHLYN 2

Give me your raincoat. You are staying here to finish your coffee. I am driving your car down Oak Street tonight.

ASHLYN

You're going to hit him? On purpose?

ASHLYN 2

I am going to hit him. But unlike you... I am going to step out of the car. I am going to call 911. I am going to hold his hand until the ambulance arrives. David Vance will live. And I will go to prison for it. I will serve the time.

Ashlyn stares at her future self, terrified but moved.

ASHLYN 2

But as Macbeth said: *"come what come may, time and the hour runs through the roughest day."* We will survive it. But you get to stay clean.

(a somber pause)

Give me the coat, Ashlyn. Let me save us.

Slowly, Ashlyn unbuttons her raincoat, shrugs it off, and hands it across the table.

Ashlyn 2 takes it and puts it on. She looks exactly like Ashlyn did five minutes ago.

ASHLYN 2

Thank you.

Ashlyn 2 gets up and turns towards the exit.

ASHLYN

What happens to you now? After the prison sentence? Where do you go?

She looks back, offering a ghost of a smile.

ASHLYN 2

I come back here. To give you your coat.

EXT. STARLIGHT DINER - NIGHT

Ashlyn 2 steps out into the downpour, disappearing into the thick, cold fog.

INT. STARLIGHT DINER - NIGHT

Ashlyn sits frozen, staring at her empty mug.

The WAITRESS appears, holding a pot of coffee.

She looks at Ashlyn, then out the window, confused.

WAITRESS

Huh. Swear I just saw you walk out
the door. Crazy how much people
look alike these days. More
coffee, hon?

ASHLYN

Yes, please. I'm going to be here
a while.

She refills Ashlyn's mug then walks away.

Ashlyn grips the warm mug with both hands.

Looks down at her phone. The clock flips to: **11:40 PM.**

Silence stretches. Only the hum of the rain.

Then, faint and muffled through the glass, a distant WAIL
cuts through the rain. The first siren.

Ashlyn blinks, and a tear escapes...

FADE OUT.