FUTURE TENSE

Thursday, April 11, 2019 would turn out to be a date of incredible dramatic and historic significance. For on that day, for the first time, an actual time traveler appeared before the world with startling information about the future.

It was a partly cloudy day in New York City, with Spring-like temperatures in the mid-70s. The General Assembly was meeting at the United Nations building on E. 42nd Street. Just after 2:00 p.m., a sound like a high-pitched siren permeated the Council Chamber. Security was alerted, as the puzzled delegates looked around and at each other. Next, a single beam of blue light appeared near the central stage podium. The surprised current speaker -- from Ethiopia -- stepped gingerly aside as the light materialized into a female form. The Chamber became absolutely quiet as the siren sound stopped.

“Greetings”, the female form communicated, although she did not speak. “Do not be frightened, I come in peace. I am called Skyla, and I come from your future here on Earth. I am communicating to each of you telepathically – simultaneously in all the world languages represented here – so that each of you can understand me. I come from the year 2169. (At this revelation, several members of the Assembly gasped.) I can stay with you here for only one hour. I came to share important information with you, and to find out the answer to a single vital question.”

Skyla was dressed in a shimmering, iridescent violet gown which extended down to her feet. She appeared to be in her late-20s, and in excellent physical condition. Her facial features were striking and beautiful, because she was a perfect blend of all the major races of the Earth. Her flawless skin was silky light brown, her long hair was dark and naturally curled, and her brown eyes were almond-shaped. She softly smiled, revealing gleaming white teeth. Extending from her gown, her arms were bare, and her fingers were graceful and tapered.

Suddenly, Skyla pulled out a kind of self-adhering breathing mask, and placed it carefully on her nose and mouth. Telepathically, she continued: “Forgive me, but I must wear this as a precaution against any contagious diseases which are present in 2019 but which no longer exist 150 years from now in my time. I will begin with some basic statements, then answer your questions until I have to leave.”

Personnel inside the communications control booth of the Council Chamber were quickly ordered to switch on all audio and video recording equipment. But because of the suddenness of Skyla’s appearance and her one hour time limit, officials quickly decided not to inform either the world media or any world leaders. All recordings made would be released immediately after this most unusual visitor left the podium.

“First of all," Skyla began, telepathically," time travel is possible – as you can plainly see. It was discovered two years ago. I am one of several volunteers in the ongoing experimentation and refinement of the process. But our physicists soon realized that we can only travel back into the past and return. We can never go into the future ahead of our own time. Next, you should know that through exploratory deep space travel, we have found many other forms of life. But none are superior, at this point, to those of Earth. The search is, of course, ongoing. Next, you should know that there was a horrific nuclear World War in 2084 which destroyed one-third of the world’s population and one-third of our arable land. The war was fought over religion, triggered by extremists. As a result, all religions have been banned from the planet as the only prudent means to ensure our survival as a species. Religion is only mentioned as a cautionary danger in history books. In 2169, scientific and medical research are mankind’s primary universal focus. All employment and education serves its ongoing development. Meanwhile, there is one world written and spoken language called SHARE. All world monies have also been abolished, and all financial interactions are transferred electronically. Robots do all the menial, mechanical, and service industry jobs. Teleportation has been invented, but it is only possible on Earth, not through outer space. People and goods are moved anywhere on the globe using that technology. As a result, there are no cars, trucks, trains, aircraft, or ships anymore. Lastly, the world’s population in 2169 is kept steady at six billion. Now, I will be happy to take any questions that you, the representative delegates of the nations of the world, care to ask. My mission chronograph indicates that I have…(she tapped a small device in her right ear briefly) thirty-three minutes remaining before my mandatory departure.”

First question: Was there ever a period of global warming, and if so, how did the Earth survive it?

Skyla: The threat of global warming was averted by 2037. All energy needs were subsequently met by universal adoption of solar, wind, and geothermal energy. Coal and oil burning were completely abandoned.

Next question: Does poverty and famine still exist in 2169?

Skyla: No, they have both been eradicated. We have learned how to control some aspects of the weather -- specifically the clouds and their water cycle -- and hence we can control all world rainfall and snowfall (as well as preventing destructive hurricanes, tornadoes, and other storms). This breakthrough aided and expanded world food production tremendously. Such production is carefully guarded and controlled. And we still have numerous protected nature preserves for both plants and animals across the globe. Incidentally, we have cracked the species language barrier, and can now communicate intelligently with other mammals and birds. But attempts at similar interactions with lower life forms, such as fish or reptiles, have proved futile.

Question: Do you still have any wars?

Skyla: Occasionally, small rebel factions will attempt to unfairly possess precious natural resources for barter or ransom. But they are always quickly defeated by the superior defensive technology of our military machines.

Question: Where do most people live in your time?

Skyla: All people live in huge centralized cities located around the world. There is total governmental control and supervision from birth to death. The six habitable continents – Antarctica is used only for mineral extractions – each have a single ruler chosen through a complex, accepted system of pure meritocracy. There is no need for voting anymore. Democracy, socialism, communism and the like have all been rendered obsolete. These six merit rulers coordinate their planning to run the world as one cohesive unit. They are truly the best and the brightest. Each serves for life.

Question: Speaking of life, how long is the human lifespan in 2169?

Skyla: All human organs are replaceable, except for the human brain. We are allowed to live to the age of 120. This limit is to preserve resources and maintain population levels. I, for example, am 106 years old, although I appear to you to be much, much younger. On one’s final designated birthday, a person is given a painless and swift-acting injection which ends their life. All new human reproduction is done in special laboratories asexually, combining fresh eggs and sperm outside the female body, then reinserting the embryo where it grows naturally. Any genetic aberrations or deformities are disposed of before term. Although the institution of marriage and the family unit still exist, the concept of love, as you know it, has simply dwindled away over time. (At this last statement, there was some disturbed murmuring from several of the delegates.)

Question: What about the arts?

Skyla: Access to historic books, motion pictures, and music is still permitted in six special Continental Repositories, but any new fiction writings or artworks or similar creativity have been abolished. Because of our focus on pure science, these alternative pursuits are deemed impractical and a waste of time. You might also like to know that continually watching television -- which your time so highly prizes -- was found in 2029 to cause irreparable optic nerve damage and was linked to causing biochemical addiction and lethargy . It was banned worldwide shortly thereafter. Now, I believe I have time for one final question…(She tapped her right ear again) Yes, three minutes. The gentleman in the back, from Brazil, your question?

Final question: Thank you, Skyla. Forgive me, but some of your answers to our questions here today are undoubtedly deeply troubling to many of us. The lack of individual freedom, personal liberty, human rights, and privacy in your descriptions is rather alarming, to say the least. What can we do to change this outcome, to change the world today to help avert these catastrophic 2169 realities?

Skyla: There is nothing you can do now. Earth’s future cannot be changed. It has already happened, don’t you understand? You -- in 2019 -- caused part of what is, in 2169.

As the time traveler prepared to depart, she made a concluding observation.

“I must leave you now. I have learned from spending only an hour with you that your time does not offer what we in your future really need, which was my sole vital reason for coming.”

“Where are you going now?” asked the delegate from Myanmar.

“I am going back…back…further back in time,” Skyla replied, with the smallest trace of – was it? – a sigh. “My leaders and all the people of Earth back home are desperately searching for the one factor which we have somehow lost over the years, the one factor that brings true fulfillment and meaning. That elusive factor is the existence of joy. The sheer joy of life and of being alive. There must have been a time back in Earth’s past when people were genuinely happy – even if only for a very short time. I absolutely must find that exact era and report back on its specific conditions and components so that we can replicate them again in my time. I must find it or the human race is doomed to futility. I know you have many more questions to ask, but I must go now. Farewell.”

With those final remarks, the mysterious female visitor from the future removed her breathing apparatus, closed her eyes, and vanished in the blue light beam from whence she had first arrived…

THE END

by Jack Karolewski

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