

SHORT STORY

CHOOSE THE WAY

# TROUBLED TIMES

# TIME TROUBLES



Independent  
Bookstore

KATHARINA GERLACH



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# Troubled Times

# Time Troubles

## Interactive SciFi Short Story

Katharina Gerlach

**Looking for qualified time-travelers to decide your past selves' future in this fun experimental story. Are you it?**

Do you remember holding a flashlight under the covers and breathlessly flipping pages forward or backward for the consequences of the action you chose (go to B)?

Or are you now wondering if you missed out on something amazing (go to A)?

A) Are you open to time changing adventures (go to B)?

B) You must face the future and the past of a time traveler on the run from the Time Police. Will you live to tell the tale? Your choices. Your story. Are you up for the challenge?

This is a twisted, non linear short story

- for those who loved “Choose your Own Adventures”,
- for those who have never heard of them but are intrigued, and
- for those who always wanted to try one but never found one telling a coherent tale.

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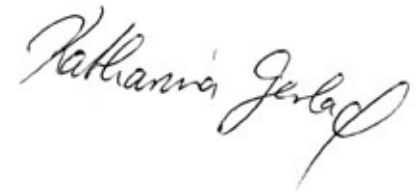
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buy legal e-books, or do you really want to give your money and possibly your valuable data to a hacker?

If you suspect this book has been pirated, go to your favorite retailer and purchase your own copy. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient.

Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author. Now, have fun with the story.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katharina Gerlach". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Katharina" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Gerlach".

# Troubled Times - Time Troubles

You've got to wake up. Now! They'll be here any minute to stop you ... I mean me ... actually they're after me but I'm you so it affects you too. Get out of bed. There's no time to put on clothes. We need to find a place to hide for a little while. Come. Through the window. Urgh ... third story is quite high up, isn't it? But you don't need to be afraid. I'll be with you.

No, we can't visit anyone you—I—we know because they will find out.

Why they're after us? We ... you will develop something so cool they want to keep playing with it.

Why I'm trying to stop you? Well, let's find a safe place first and I'll tell you. Come on, it's only a few more steps down the fire escape, and there's a manhole cover in the alley below. They won't suspect us there.

Yes, it stinks. Can't be helped. Stay on the footpath. There should be a workman's room ahead. Gosh, I'll have to oil the hinges. There. Sit on the sofa. The clothes are for you, but I'm not sure they'll fit. I've never been good at remembering the sizes I wore, and you're the youngest *me* I've met. So to speak you're the root of all my *mes*.

Yes, I am old. I'm probably the oldest *me* you'll ever meet. After my return I'll die in all realities. I've checked.

What? Yes, I can time travel. And so can they. That's why you cannot tell anyone about this hidey-hole, or they'll find us. But I already know you will not, because they're not here yet.

You're right, I should sit down too.

They are members of the Time Police, and they've been tasked with stopping me from stopping *me*.

How I know? Well, they killed me in several time lines already. It's disjointing to say the least, because as long as I exist, I will carry all the memories of the others with me.

Why I've come to you, and what I'm trying to stop you from doing? You will build a time machine, and that will change the world. It will literally split it up. Shall I [tell you all](#) that will happen [or rather not](#)?

What? You promise to not build a time machine? I know you will break that promise. If you would keep it, I would feel a pull, dragging my current *me* back into you, since you are the root. I'd have enough time to leave since I'm far removed from you, time-wise. However, I don't feel the pull, so you will forget your promise for sure. You will believe this to be a nightmare and not remember until it's too late. Maybe I should do something more drastic ...

Stop struggling so. I must kill you because the time machine has to be prevented, or it'll break the world. I never thought it'd be so difficult to strangle myself. Stop the death rattle.

Are you still breathing?

Are you?

Come on, boy. This was just meant as a warning. Tomorrow, you will see the marks on your throat, and you will know that this really came to pass.

Nonsense, I will not be punished for trying to kill myself. Now [sit still and listen](#) to what I have to tell you. Believe me. You will be glad I came when this night is over.

Fine. You've got a bright head on your shoulders, young man. Getting into university at your age isn't an easy feat, but you already know that. If you keep up working the way you do now, you will discover a trick of the time that everyone overlooked so far, including Einstein, and he was brilliant. You will keep your discovery to yourself while you explore the consequences. However, on September 3rd next year, you will build a time machine. And for what? Because you will be sorry that you declined your fellow student's invitation for a date.

Which student? Haha, I will not tell you. It will have to remain a mystery to the day she asks.

You will build your machine in the backyard of your parents house. It will look a lot like a bicycle in a wire cage, which it mostly consists of, with a yard-long lance protruding from the front. Seven car batteries are fitted inside, and although charging them will take several hours, they will provide enough power for any length of trip. As soon as you will sit on the seat and use the pedals to release a thin but steady stream of energy, the machine will glow with an unearthly sheen and catapult you out of your time. You will travel the River of Time, and it will look like a real river to you. The waves will contain myriads of pictures of billions of people living through countless moments in time, and you will become addicted.

When you leave the time stream, you will meet her without her noticing that you're there twice. During the film you two will visit, you will kiss her, and love will bloom, although she'll often wonder why you don't seem to recognize her at times. Then, you will catch up with your old time stream and your relationship will improve. Still, you'll spend long intervals in the time stream simply watching the ripples human lives make. Sometimes, she will complain but rarely.

On Sunday July 7th, three years from now, you will ask her for her hand in marriage, your heart brimming with the love you feel for her.

Will she say [yes](#) or [no](#)? What do you think?

Of course she will agree. You are the love of her life. Out of pure joy, and because you trust her vow of fealty, you will dismantle the time machine and turn it into a sculpture for your bride. You will become the university's youngest couple, and everyone will tell you how silly it is to marry so young. But fifty years and three children later, when she's diagnosed with cancer, your love will still be as strong as on the day you proposed. You will be holding her hand from diagnosis to death, and then dwindle away until you're too frail to walk. A day before your heart gives up, you will burn the notes you made about the time machine and the principle behind it, and I will never have shown up in your life except to watch you from a distance.

You will not notice how I will battle the Time Police. I will still be young and strong enough to escape. But even though you will be unaware, I know they will be after me until I'll finally manage to erase or save the last split-off timeline.

**The End**



You're right. You will have left her alone once too often, and she gave up on you. She will have found a new love. Her answer will devastate you. You will feel as if your heart has been ripped from your chest without you dying. You will bury yourself in work, abandoning the time machine because you know that there's nothing you will be able to do to change her mind, even if you would travel back again. Healing the hole where your heart should have been will take years, and you will never be able to forget her.

Of course you will have lovers, once even a wife, but none of them will matter. The only thing that will give you pleasure and make you feel alive again will be when you gain more academical accolades. Ten years from now, the university's dean will retire, and you will expect to be asked to take his place. However, an older man will be chosen. In your eyes he's unfit for the job and not even looking presentable with his bald head.

“He's more experienced,” the committee will say.

“He's been mollycoddling the committee more,” your colleagues will say.

“He's more social and gets along with the students better,” your wife will say, and that will seal your divorce, although you will not know it then.

Two years after that, when the divorce will be through and your wife will have taken nearly all you own, you will use your time machine again. You will return to the point in time when your rival applied for a job at the university. You will delay his arrival until the committee refuses to see him, and thus you crush the man's career before it begins. Then, you will return to your own time. But you will not land unnoticed. Guess who is waiting. [Your ex-wife](#)? [The man whom you crushed](#)? Or [maybe me](#)?

Naturally through your meddling with time, your divorce will not have happened. Time is confusing that way. So you're right, your wife will be waiting for you. You will never learn what she wants though, since your time machine materializes with the pointy spike embedded in her body. Frantically you will try to reengage the mechanism to return to a few minutes earlier but your batteries will not have enough power left to do that. Although you do not love your wife, you will hold her dead body in your arms and cry until the police arrives. They will arrest you for suspected murder. The interrogation will go on for endless hours. In the end, you will break down and tell them about your time machine. Of course no one will believe you. You will be sentenced to a stay in a psychiatric unit with an undetermined length. After the verdict, you will try to kill yourself, but a warden guarding you will prevent it just in time. After that, the doctors of the facility will medicate you with antidepressants and monitor you constantly. You will live the remainder of your life staring mindlessly out of the window.

However, the notes you have made way back when you first built the machine will be stored in a cupboard for unpublished manuscripts in the university library where, a year after your verdict, the bald man whose application to your university you torpedoed will find them and use them for a stellar career. In less than fifteen years, he will become President of our country; after a quarter century, he will have conquered most of the world. Soon after, he will become Emperor of Earth. He will be the founder of the Time Police, a small elite troupe of extremely loyal men and women. He will only recruit very few, to keep chances of betrayal low, and he will never tell them how the time machine works, naturally. But he will provide them with enough gadgets so they will be able to wipe out any threat to him in his present, past, and future. And since you're locked away, unable to assemble another time machine, you will not be able to do anything against it. Heck, you will not even know this is happening.

**The End**

You are right. I will be there, waiting for you. But you will not recognize me. Worried that I've seen something that I shouldn't have, you will invite me into your house even though I will be a stranger to you: a stranger who will seem uncomfortably familiar to you. I will even help you to maneuver the time machine into your living room so that no neighbor will see it.

When that's done, you'll offer me a beer spiced with sleeping pills which I will pretend to accept. When you will be sitting opposite of me, waiting for the pills to take effect, I will pull a gun from my pocket and shoot you right between the eyes. I will wonder about the small amount of blood since I expected more, but then I will take your notes. The paper will be dark and brittle with faded ink. It will burn easily in your ashtray. Taking the machine apart will require but a few hours. Setting fire to your house will be harder. But when I will leave your home, flames will be licking at the walls, melting down what is left of the time machine, and I will activate my own, a much smaller, much more advanced version of your machine, to eliminate another *me* in a different thread of time, relieved that the Time Police didn't show up in this thread.

**The End**

When you return from your trip, you will roll the time machine into your living room and cover it with a blanket. Proudly you will admire the framed certificate on your wall proving you're dean now.

At that moment, your doorbell will ring, startling you. Since your machine is hidden to the best of your knowledge, you will open the door reluctantly. Imagine your surprise when you recognize the man standing on your doorstep. It will be the same man whose application you torpedoed. It will have been just a short while ago for you, but years for him. He will greet you with a smile, and you will invite him in. Something in your mind will tell you that he means trouble.

You will offer him a drink and ask what brought him to your town, and he will tell you his tale.

"I came to thank you for stopping me from going to that job interview when I applied as an assistant professor at your university," he will say. "The rejection hit me so hard, I changed my profession completely. I decided to follow my father's footsteps in politics, and by now I've already been nominated as senator for the next election. I admit, I am the big outsider. Not many believe I stand a chance, but I know something they don't." Sipping his whiskey, he'll smile at you, but his eyes will remain icy.

Your fingers will clench around the neck of the heavy decanter, and your throat will dry out, making it hard to speak. "Care to explain?"

"Well, my friend, when I stepped out of my taxi this afternoon, I walked around your house to confront you with what you've done to my career as a scientist. I couldn't find you, so I lay in the grass of your garden, watching your living room through your windows, expecting you to walk through the doors at some point. Imagine my surprise when you appeared in a glowing cage-like machine out of nowhere just a short while after I had hidden myself. Believe me, my brain worked overtime, but the only logical explanation for your appearance is that you invented something that no one else has. It could be a machine for traveling long distances, but if I had to bet money on it, I would say it's a time machine."

You will stand frozen at your bar, too numb to ask questions.

"I have a proposal for you," he will continue. "You will help me with my political career, and I will pay you a secret salary no scientist ever had, a salary the IRS won't know about. If I become senator, I will privately fund a research project of your choice."

"What would I need to do?" The words will leave your mouth before your brain has caught up with the events.

"For a successful campaign I will need more funds, so the first step would be a trip two weeks back to my previous self to hand him a printout of some of the stocks I was considering to buy at that time." He will look so smug, you really long to [smash his face](#). But [his offer will entice you](#) too—unlimited money, research funding for the foreseeable future ... You will hesitate.



“Deal,” you will say. With the decanter in your hand, you will approach him as if to refill his glass. But when you get close enough, you will swing the heavy glass bottle and smash it on his head. You'll feel sorry for the expensive whiskey splashing about, and you'll worry about the blood and brain matter on your sofa and floor. It will take you a while to clean up the mess and wrap the body in a tarpaulin. All the while you will swear and curse and feel sorry for losing your temper.

You will sweat all the way to the outskirts of town, and it will not be from the exertion of carrying the heavy corpse from the house into the car and later from the car into the wilderness. You will dig a hole and dump the body inside, but since you're not a biologist, you will not know that the hole is not deep enough.

Only a few days later, animals will open the shallow grave, and a young girl on a hiking trip will discover your enemy. You will hear about it in the news. The anchorman will expatiate on the murderer's stupidity, claiming the police found countless fingerprints on the tarpaulin wrapped around the body.

Panic will grip you.

With flying fingers, you will turn to the only defense you have, your time machine. If only you can undo the man's death. Are the [batteries loaded](#) to their maximum capacity [or not](#)? Maybe it would be a good idea to swap them for something smaller but more powerful. Your mind will already begin to work on that problem while your fingers dance over the dials.

*Drat*, you will think. The battery status is too low. You know everything will be over. You can see it in your mind, as vividly as if it had happened to you already.

The police will arrest you for murder, and the interrogation will go on for endless hours. In the end you will break down and tell them about your time machine and the man's indecent offer. Naturally no one will believe you. You will be sentenced to a stay in a psychiatric unit with an undetermined length. After the verdict, you will try to kill yourself, but a warden guarding you will prevent it just in time. After that, the doctors of the facility will medicate you with antidepressants and monitor you constantly. You will live the remainder of your life staring mindlessly out of the window.

You will shake this pseudo-memory, determined to never let it come to pass. No one shall ever find out about the time machine. In the distance you will hear the howling of sirens. As fast as you can, you will dismantle the machine, while your notes will burn in the ashtray.

The parts of the machine are lying around like glowing, golden shards. As the sirens draw nearer, you will realize that it won't be too difficult to put them back together, even without a plan. You will need something drastic, something that will deform the brass pieces.

You will remember the canister of fuel you still got in the garage. Just before the sirens race up the street where you live, you will drag it to your living room and generously splash it everywhere but mostly around the machine's remains. You will ignite it with the stub of your cigarette. As the flames begin to dance on the floor of your living room, you will pick up your gun to buy you some more time. When the police will finally shoot you, your house will be a roiling inferno. But the secret of the time machine will be safe.

**The End**

*Thank Chronos* you will think. The batteries are full. In the distance you will hear the howling of sirens. As fast as you can, you will start the time machine and engage the mechanism. Floating on the changing waves of the time stream, you'll ponder your situation. There isn't much you will be able to do. You cannot let your previous self accept the man's offer, and you cannot let him kill the man. Neither can you let the two walk their ways, because the bald man will surely make your younger self's life hell until he agrees to his scheming.

Your gaze will travel over the endless sea, and faces will light up. You will realize that the self you've been thinking about cannot be the only self that split off of you. What will you do? Will you [search for your other selves](#)? Or should you rather take out the immediate threat by [preventing the murder](#)?

In the passing years, you will have learned a lot about time and the time stream. You will realize that if you go back to your own timeline, you might cause a paradox as long as the split-off time lines still existed. What would the time do to prevent it? Would it destroy time lines if you follow that path? You will decide to leave this problem for last. For now, you will concentrate on finding your other selves. You will either kill them or put them on a better path in life. Like a beacon, the face of the girl you loved so much will light up your soul. Maybe you will be able to find only one of your previous selves that will be allowed true happiness.

Your first meeting with the Time Police is short but painful. They will shoot at you. Luckily the layout of depot where you landed will be very confusing, and the bullet will miss you. It will dislodge a heavy crate which will shatter your leg. It's agony to free your flesh from the crate's shards, but you will work fast. Using a long wooden splinter as a crutch, you will evade the Time Police in the gigantic storage room. You will not believe your luck when you discover that you've landed in a depot full of pre-loaded car batteries. Despite your broken leg, you manage to sneak one of them to your machine. One member of the Time Police will be guarding it, but you will knock him out with the battery before he even notices you. It won't take you long to fetch some more batteries and replace the used ones in your machine. Just as the policeman returns to consciousness, you will escape into the time stream.

This encounter will show you that the time machine as it is at that point in time will be too cumbersome to use often. Also it takes too long to recharge the batteries. You will decide to find a place to rest where your leg will be able to heal while you will improve the machine in secret. You will set course for a thread of time unpolluted by the effects of your time machine and trundle upstream into the future while pondering how to miniaturize the machine and increase its battery life. You will hope that the doctors in the future have a way of renewing the splintered bone in your leg.

Once those two problems will be solved, you will head for the first in a long line of time threads split off your own life to eliminate all knowledge of your invention. If only you would be able to shake off the Time Police. Although they cannot trace your movements, they will show up in some threads of your former selves' lives. It will be difficult to evade them, but you will succeed.

**The End**



You will decide that the lingering threat of getting jailed is more important right now, where now is, of course, relative. You will set your machine's timer and coordinates to your living room, just before the dangerous incident. As you materialize, you realize that it would have been a better idea to arrive earlier and stop the bald man from hiding in your garden in the first place. But before you can reset your dials, an irresistible force will suck you out from under the blanket. You will merge with your previous self, the self from your own timeline. Realizing your fault too late, you will find yourself facing the bald man's icy stare again.

“I have a proposal for you,” you will hear him say once more. “You will help me with my political career, and I will pay you a secret salary no scientist ever had, a salary the IRS won't know about. If I become senator, I will privately fund a research project of your choice.”

“What would I need to do?” The words will leave your mouth before your brain has caught up with the events. It seems as if you will be unable to change anything that has already happened in your own timeline. You realize that you will have to live out this part of your life and bear the consequences. If only you had found loyal love when you offered it. Instead, the man's words will hit you like the hammer of the Bell of Doom.

“For a successful campaign, I will need more funds, so the first step would be a trip two weeks back to my previous self to hand him a printout of some of the stocks I was considering to buy at that time.” He will look so smug, you really long to [smash his face](#). The feeling will be even stronger, now that you know what will be coming.

You will ponder his offer. Would it really be so bad to gain a little more power, or to secure the funds for few more years of research?

The bald man will fill your ears with his political agenda; enough work and equal pay for everyone, healthy food for all, regular schooling for all children regardless their upbringing, a safety net of health insurance and retirement pensions. It will all sound so good to you that you will agree to his bargain.

What follows will be a nightmare. It will start small. You will organize money for him and denounce competition by planting false evidence in the past. You will do everything he asks of you because if you stop, your secret will not be a secret much longer. And what would become of the world if everyone would change their past? Little will you know how much your unwanted partner will dread the same.

Your heart will ache all the time as you watch the bald man rise to power, always smiling, always jovial. The changes in society will be subtle at first, but soon you will notice the restrictions of personal freedom. When the end of the bald man's second term as President will draw near, he will change important laws. This time you will have a lot to do, bribing, hindering, even murdering senators. You will return to the third time of his presidency feeling sick to the stomach. Still, you will smile with him and reassure him that you're his best friend.

That's why he will look so shocked the day you press a 3D-printed colt onto the bridge of his nose. But when you pull the trigger, the gun will explode. Both of you will obtain severe injuries, but while he will wake up in a luxurious hospital, you will be left untreated in a jail overflowing with the scum of the world.

Your wounds will infect, and the jail's doctors will only do the bare minimum to keep you alive. To torture you even more, the President will allow you a television set with nothing but the official news channel. You will be forced to watch him conquer most of the world. Once, he will even wave your notes about the time machine around, pretending they're nothing but a speech. You will squirm knowing the power he has.

Soon after, he will become Emperor of Earth. He will visit you then, telling you of a lone version of yourself destroying its other selves in the other timelines and how he plans to counter the man's attacks. He will assemble a small elite troupe of extremely loyal men and women to be his Time Police and provide them with several time machines. Thus equipped they will be able to wipe out any threat to him in his present, past, and future. Of course he brags how he will never tell them how the time machine works, but you know they are bound to use them for their own good too. And since you will be locked away, unable to assemble another time machine, you will not be able to do anything against it.

When he will be gone, you will cry until I show up.

I will tell you of all the *mes* I thwarted and even killed. You will smile as I tell you about all the burned notes, the smashed, burnt, or dismantled time machines. You will even try to sit up despite your pain when I explain how I have materialized in the bald man's bedroom, shot him, burnt his notes and destroyed his time machine, and his guards never so much as heard me. Together we will watch the news about his death. You will cry tears of joy when I tell you that there are only two more time lines to change. One will be the one I have come from. And the other will be the only one I hope to turn into a happy end for all of us.

“Will he ... I ... be happy there?” you will ask, and I will nod. Surely at least [one of us will find true love](#), but if not, I will do what needs to be done for as long as my old, frail body will live.

You will die smiling.

And then I will return to my sleeping self shortly before the whole mess begins. As I land on the roof of your house, I will notice a tell tale flicker down in the street. Finally the last team of the Time Police caught up with me once more. I will wince because I'm so close to the end of my trials.

I will hurry down to your apartment. You will not know yet that your live is about to explode. You will not have met the love of your live. But I will make sure you will know exactly how important she will be in all of our lives when the time comes.

I must keep you from using the time stream. You must spend long periods with her as often as you can. Humans are not meant to meddle with time.

What will you say? Are you more interested in your [career](#) or in [love](#)?

You push me aside, and I'm old, so I fall. I can see you flee, but I have broken my leg and cannot follow. However I will be using my time machine to watch over you. My heart will hurt to see you fall into the same trap that caught me. With concern I will notice that your addiction to the time stream is growing. I will watch you meeting the love of your life, abandoning her way too often for a ride on the waves of time.

When you will ask her to become your wife on Sunday July 7th, your heart brimming with the love you feel for her, I know [she will decline](#). What do you think?



You listen to my tale, as twisted as it is, and I can finally relax. I believe that in the end I have found the one *me* that's worthy of the love of my live. You help me up, and together we walk back to your house. I am glad you're not angry with me for throttling you, and that you believe me. Silently I pray to Chronos that [we will not run into the Time Police](#), but I fear that [they are close](#).

It's hard for me to climb the fire escape ladder, but I manage.

“It is time for me to leave,” I say, and you insist on showing me off. Naturally I could have left from your room, but for reasons I cannot name I decide to use the roof instead. So we climb up all the way. I'm panting hard when we reach the top of the building.

When we embrace, a voice says, “Put your hands in the air where I can see them.”

You obey, but I duck behind you.

A member of the Time Police in his black uniform steps from the shadows, a futuristic pistol aimed at us. “You will now come out behind the root.”

So they know. I grin sheepishly.

“They will not harm you,” I say. “You are the root, the only *me* before all the other threads split off. If they harm or kill you, they will disfigure or destroy their master.”

As long as I stay behind my younger me, I will be safe.

A woman tackles me, and I crash to the ground. My shoulder hurts hellishly, but I fight as best I can. Since she's much younger than I am, she pushes me closer and closer to the edge.

“Let him go,” her comrade shouts. “You're in the line of fire.”

When she steps back, I let myself fall over the rim of the roof. The shot flashes over me without doing any harm. I hear them curse as I fall. Five stories of free falling gives me enough time to activate my time machine. Since my former *me* is safe and informed about everything, I can leave to [face my final foe](#). But it'd also be nice to [say goodbye](#) to the only *me* that still has a chance at happiness.

I return to the roof to a moment just before the Time Police arrives and wait patiently. They are using the fire escape ladder too. The metal groans and shudders under their steps. To my surprise there are four of them. I adjust the setting on my electrical gun to a spread that will allow me to stun all four at once.

“You will check timestream Omega five,” their leader orders. “We'll follow as soon as we make sure the root is safe.”

Before the second team can activate their time machines, I shoot, and all four topple. It takes a while to understand the settings on their gadgets. It seems my enemy has changed the design somewhat, although not for the better if I may say so. Four times I activate the return feature on their machines and set the self-destruct with enough time so they can flee. I make it impossible to stop the countdown. Four times the stunned bodies vanish in a flash of light soon after. I wait again.

When my former self steps onto the roof with *me* at his heels, I am dragged back into my old self. We're too close time-wise to stay separate at such a short distance. You don't notice, and I savor your embrace.

“Take good care,” you say and I nod.

“Take good care of our love,” I say and activate my own time machine. As I enter the time stream, I am sure you will meet her and take good care of the love of my life. During the film you will watch on your first date, you will kiss her, and love will bloom. On Sunday July 7th, three years from now, you will ask her for her hand in marriage, your heart brimming with the love you feel for her. And [she will say yes](#). Meanwhile I have one more thing to do, [one more thread to eliminate](#).

It's hard for me to climb the fire escape ladder, but I manage.

“It is time for me to leave,” I say, and you insist on showing me off. Naturally I could have left from your room but for reasons I couldn't name I decide to use the roof instead. So we climb up all the way. I'm panting hard when we reach the top of the building. You help me step onto the roof and embrace me awkwardly.

“Take good care,” you say and I nod.

“Take good care of our love,” I say and activate my time machine. As I enter the time stream, I am sure you will meet her and take good care of the love of my life. During the film you will watch on your first date, you will kiss her, and love will bloom. On Sunday July 7th, three years from now, you will ask her for her hand in marriage, your heart brimming with the love you feel for her. And [she will say yes](#). Meanwhile I have one more thing to do, [one more thread to eliminate](#).



You listen to my tale, as twisted as it is, and I can finally relax. I believe that in the end I found the one *me* that's worthy of the woman I loved my whole life. You help me up, and together we walk back to your house. I pray to Chronos that we will not run into the Time Police, and we are lucky. It seems they have left this time stream after they couldn't find us.

It's hard for me to climb the fire escape ladder. I have grown older than I have acknowledged, chasing my *mes* through time, but I manage. In your room I tell you all I know about our girl's wishes and dreams, but I do not divulge her identity. It would take away the surprise when she will ask you out.

When I leave for the time stream, I am sure you will accept her invitation and take good care of the woman we love. During the film you will watch on your first date, you will kiss her, and love will bloom. On Sunday July 7th, three years from now, you will ask her for her hand in marriage, your heart brimming with the love you feel for her.

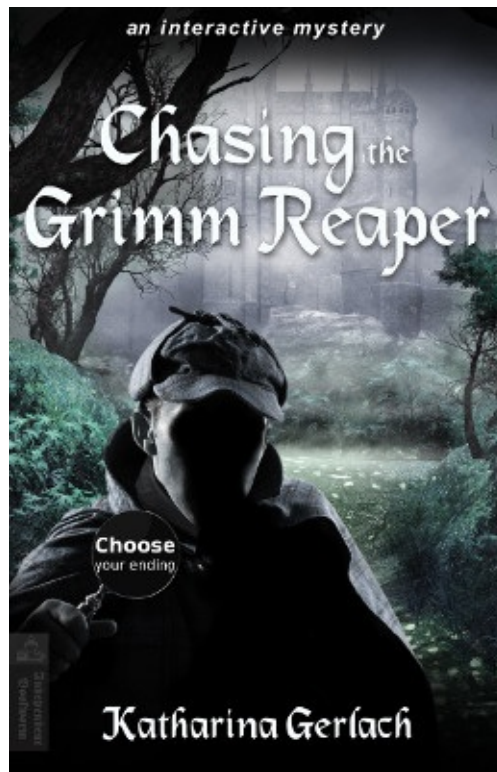
Of course she will agree. You will be the love of her life. Out of pure joy, and because you trust her vow of fealty, you will build a sculpture made of cogs and wheels for your bride. You will become the university's youngest couple, and everyone will tell you how silly it is to marry so young. But fifty years and three kids later, when she's diagnosed with cancer, your love will still be as strong as on the day you proposed. You will be holding her hand from diagnosis to death, and then dwindle away until you're too frail to live. On the day your heart gives up, you will remember my story about the time machine and hope I will be successful when [I face my final foe](#).

Of course she will agree. You will be the love of her life. Out of pure joy, and because you trust her vow of fealty, you will dismantle the time machine and turn it into a sculpture for your bride. You will become the university's youngest couple, and everyone will tell you how silly it is to marry so young. But fifty years and three kids later, when she's diagnosed with cancer, your love will still be as strong as on the day you proposed. You will be holding her hand from diagnosis to death, and then dwindle away until you're too frail to walk. A day before your heart gives up, you will remember my story about the time machine. Happy about the way your life turned out, you will burn your notes on the time machine and the principle behind it, and hope I will be successful when [I face my final foe](#).

After a short stop in the far future where I buy a stun gun with a self-destruct mechanism strong enough to blow up a house, I will arrive in my living room just as you, my previous self from my own timeline, cover the time machine with a blanket after your last journey where you stopped your academical rival. I know that eventually I will get sucked into my old body. After all, this is my own time line, but since I will be so much older than I used to be at that time, I will have many minutes before that will happen. With the new weapon, that will be enough. Hiding in the time machine I will be able to hear the conversation between you and the bald man. But this time, I will not allow either of us three to leave this house alive. And with us, the secret of the time machine will die.

**The final End**

## Another Interactive Mystery by the Author



*In this interactive fantasy mystery, danger lurks in unexpected corners, and for those who are willing to try, here is a new way to read a story.*

Truth be told, I don't know what to think of it. One day I'm sitting on my cozy sofa reading a Sherlock Holmes novel when his world suddenly becomes far more real than my own. I am asked to solve the murder of the Fairy Godmother in Sagaland, the kingdom of fairy tales. Shall I really go, and would you come along?

Yes → read the book

You don't like mysteries → try [my other books](#)

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**Available in January 2017**

# Acknowledgments

Without the help of my long-term mentor, Holly Lisle, this book wouldn't have been what it is now, but without my family's support, it would still be part of my Unwritten Library. Thank you. I love you more than I can say.

Also, thank you, dear reader, for buying this book. Your enthusiasm for reading makes it possible for authors like me to live our dream. I hope you enjoyed these stories.

# About Katharina Gerlach

Katharina Gerlach was born in Germany in 1968. She and her three younger brothers grew up in the middle of a forest in the heart of the Luneburgian Heather. After romping through the forest with imagination as her guide, the tomboy learned to read and disappeared into magical adventures, past times or eerie fairytale woods.

She didn't stop at reading. During her training as a landscape gardener, she wrote her first novel, a manuscript full of a beginner's mistakes. Fortunately, she found books on Creative Writing, and soon her stories improved. For a while, reality interfered with her writing but after finishing a degree in forestry and a PhD in Science, she returned to her vocation. She likes to write Fantasy, Science Fiction, and Historical Novels for all age groups.

At present, she is writing at her next project in a small house near Hildesheim, Germany, where she lives with her husband, three children, and a dog.

Please visit [Katharina's website](http://www.katharinagerlach.com) (www.katharinagerlach.com), [her Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/KatharinaGerlach.Autorin) (www.facebook.com/KatharinaGerlach.Autorin), or follow her on [twitter](https://twitter.com/CatGerlach) (@CatGerlach) or [Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com/catgerlach/) (www.pinterest.com/catgerlach/).

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