

Professor Payne's Intrepid Time Travelers
m.m. Kline

Chapter 4 Excerpt

Payne stared, mesmerized. Once again he considered the possibility that he was hallucinating, or perhaps he had traveled to another country in the present day.

The young woman frowned. "How did you get here?"

"Where's here?"

"Hmmm... lots of sand, no vegetation whatsoever... I don't know, Egypt perhaps?"

"In present day?" He waited for another sarcastic reply.

"You have a Leap Behind?" Another question asked abruptly.

"A what?"

"A Leap Behind... you know...." She lifted her right hand.

Clenched in it were knitting needles with several rows of knitted yarn attached.

Payne stared blankly at the needles.

"How did you get here?" She asked again.

He shrugged. "I'm not sure."

"You did something special... something you've never done before. You have an heirloom of some sort? What are you holding?"

The professor duplicated her movement and raised his right hand, in which he clutched the wooden pipe. He could still feel its warmth.

"Is that it? Is that your Leap Behind?"

Payne held up his pipe. *So that's what it is... a Leap Behind.* "A Leap Behind? Is that what this is? What exactly is a Leap Behind?"

She looked at him with impatience and then glanced at the moon, which was beginning to descend. She turned and started back down the hill.

“Hey, wait a minute.” He reached out with his left hand and grabbed her arm. “Please tell me what a Leap Behind is.”

She glanced at the hand on her arm.

He quickly released her.

“I have to keep moving. I mustn’t be late. I promised. Come on.” She turned away and he followed. After a moment or two she turned to him as they scaled another small dune. “So this is your first time? You took a puff and presto... here you are?”

“Well, no... this is my third time. I took a puff and found myself here twice before.”

She stopped. “You’ve been here twice before?”

He nodded. “The first time I ran into a shepherder. Not sure who was more frightened.”

“And now you’ve come back... why?”

“Egypt calls to me. The desert... it feels like it’s part of me, like the Pharaohs are my ancestors.” He glanced up and continued. “So the Leap Behind, do you know what it is?”

She nodded and continued as she walked. “A Leap Behind is a gift given from generation to generation. The longer the item is passed on, the stronger its powers become. I believe the stronger the powers are, the farther back in time you can travel. Basically the Leap Behind is a time machine.”

“So we have traveled back to Egypt... the time of the Pharaohs....”

The woman nodded. “Several centuries before Christ.” She whispered the next sentence as if the dunes had ears. “This is the reign of Hatshepsut. We must go. If we are caught by the shepherders, they will raise the alarm that there are intruders about. We must not be caught. Follow me.” She turned and quickened her pace.

The professor quickly followed. “Wait! I don’t know your name.

I am Payne, Payne Johnson. I’m a professor of Egyptology.” He struggled to keep up with her.

“I’m Cleo... Cleo Patra.”

Payne laughed. “Seriously? Cleo Patra?”

“Cleo... just Cleo... now stop talking! We must hurry! We must approach the city after the moon has set but before the city awakens. We will enter the city through the back entrance when the gates open.”

Professor Payne stopped. “You’ve been here before!”

“Of course, many times, but it is becoming dangerous. Anyone who is an ally to the Queen will soon be destroyed. Perhaps you know. I mean, I know she’ll die, but when? And will it be from natural causes? I’m afraid this might be my last chance to see her.

We must hurry!” She increased her pace, not waiting for his replies to her questions.

The professor gasped with exertion. He longed to answer her and impress her with his knowledge of Ancient Egypt and her beloved Hatshepsut but he was unable to speak and breathe at the same time, so he just concentrated on breathing.

They continued to push their way through the desert as the moon began its descent into the west. Cleo said nothing more. The only sound for miles was the sound of their breathing, hers quiet and slow, his loud and ragged.

Just as Payne thought about taking a quick puff on his pipe and going home to rest, Cleo stopped. “Can you see it? Can you see the temple?”

Payne peered into the darkness. The small city was a short distance away, dark and tiny in the vast white desert. He could just make out a long, low building silhouetted against a tall mountain in the fading moonlight.

Finally they neared the outskirts of the city. Cleo sidled up against the dark wall, stopped, crossed her legs and plopped to the ground. Payne copied the movement and found himself settled on hard ground covered with sand. The night was still except for their labored breathing, and after a moment or two that quieted and faded.

Payne felt that he would burst with questions but was unsure whether it was safe to talk. He finally couldn’t remain quiet. “Can we talk? Is it safe?”

The moonlight caught the angles of Cleo’s face as she nodded.

“Just talk quietly. The gates are secured for the night. No one can enter or leave the city. Very few brave souls stay outside the city walls in the evening hours. And now that the Queen’s reign is

coming to an end, only the murdering traitors dare to roam the darkened desert.” Contempt dripped from her voice.

Payne tried to clear his head and decide what questions he needed to ask first. His curiosity about the Leap Behind overcame his professional need to ask about the historical significance of the experience. “The Leap Behind... can you explain it to me?”

“It’s quite simple, really. Every family has an heirloom that has been passed from generation to generation. The heirloom has the power to transport a direct descendent to the past. Or maybe even the future... perhaps the future....”

Payne urgently tried to encourage her to continue. “But the past?”

“Well, yes... the past. The thing is, most people give their heirloom away to someone who is not a direct descendent or perhaps they sell it at a yard sale, unaware of its value, or maybe they toss it after deciding it’s just junk. But some who keep their heirloom, treasure it and put it away somewhere safe where it remains unused and forgotten. They never use it. They never become aware of its powers. And then there are a few, like you and me, who pick up an heirloom, remember someone special, light a pipe or knit a row.

Suddenly we’re in a different world, a world to explore or even to live in.” She paused for a breath.

“Have you met other travelers? Besides me?”

She nodded. “One or two. Eccentric people who have traveled in different time periods in different countries. We’ve communicated through the Internet. Of course there are those who get on our web site and try to fake their experiences, but every now and then we learn of another time traveler. And there is Whispering Pines—“

“Whispering Pines?”

“A school for the children of the rich and famous. Many of our fellow time travelers work there and—”

“Do they all travel to Egypt?”

Cleo shook her head. “I don’t know why, but most people can go to only one place, and only during a certain time period. But we also don’t know how long that time period is. It could be thousands of years. We aren’t completely sure. It seems like time is interconnected and we are a part of history. I don’t think we *change* history, but we are a part of it. Our roles in Egypt have always been a part of the lives we touch when we are here.

When the reign of the Queen is over I think I will still be able to travel to Egypt. I will see her mighty temple fall and become ruined, covered in sand, but I will still be able to travel to the land of the Pharaohs... and so will you.”

“So does time stand still in our world?”

“No. Time continues. Even for the time traveler. Hatshepsut’s temple might still be standing but when she dies, she will still be dead and a new Pharaoh will rule. Perhaps her step-son....”

Payne glanced at Cleo. *Cleo Patra... is she serious? Was she named for Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen?* “How did you find your Leap Behind? How did you know it was special? Did your parents tell you?” He thought about his dad. There had been a time before the end of his dad’s life that he could have mentioned to Payne the unusual powers the pipe held.

Cleo glanced at him and then at the wooden needles in her hand.

She spoke softly. “I was an orphan... abandoned on the doorstep of a church wrapped in a blanket with the knitting needles by my side.

Someone had started a small piece of knitting and it was attached to the needles with a small wad of yarn. The nuns took me in and put the knitting needles away for me. When I left for college they handed them to me and told me they were the only thing my mother or father had left me. After a few months I found a book on how to knit and decided to try it. It was early October. I ended up in the Sahara, scared and alone. I was sure I was having a breakdown.”

Her voice faltered. “I wandered in circles through the heavy sand until I had no more strength. Finally, I sat down, put the needles together and knitted another stitch. Seconds later I was back in my dorm room.”

Payne remembered feeling the pull of the pipe. “And then you tried it again.”

“Yes, but I realized I needed more light to see with. I waited for a full moon and within moments found myself here... well, close to here. I walked toward the moon, keeping it in front of me so I could see. Suddenly I found this wall so I sat down and waited for daylight to come. I hadn’t realized yet that I had gone back in time. I had jeans on, a sweatshirt and flip flops.

Farther along this wall there are gates, and at dawn they open. I decided to be brave and walk through those gates. I never expected that I had entered the world of Ancient Egypt. Within moments I

was surrounded by the Queen's guard and brought deep into the city." She paused as she reached for her memories. "Of course, I was very different from anyone they had ever seen before. The guards took me to the Queen's quarters and I was presented to Hatshepsut. She was enthralled. She touched my hair, my clothes, my jewelry, even my teeth. She loved my teeth.

She was young and beautiful... except for her teeth."

The moon dropped beneath the horizon and Cleo stood up.

"We must go. The gates will open and for a few moments there will be confusion as people leave. We will enter then."

She gathered her long black hair and piled it high, used the knitting needles to secure it, then pulled the long drape in the back of her tunic up and around her head. Only her eyes were visible.

She crept close to the wall, bent at the waist. Payne copied her movements. As she predicted, the gates opened a few minutes later and in a flurry a horde of people left the city.

The sound of sheep behind Payne drew his attention to the herd and the several young boys who were leading them out of the desert.

The boys and their charges rounded the corner and entered the city after the masses had left the city through the same gates. Cleo grabbed Payne's hand and together they entered the city concealed among the herd.