




THE TIME MACHINE

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 TIMELESS CLASSICS

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We Saw the Time Machine

The Time Traveler, as we shall call him, was speaking to us of deep matters. His gray eyes were shining, and his usually pale face was bright. We had just finished dinner at his house that night in 1895. There were six of us there—a doctor, a very young man, a mayor, a psychologist, a storekeeper named Filby, and me. All of us admired our host for his bright mind and his many inventions. In fact, we were sitting in comfortable chairs that he had invented. As he spoke, he pointed at us excitedly.

“You must follow me carefully,” he said. “Most of the math that they taught you at school is based on incorrect ideas.”

“Ha! Do you expect us to believe that?” said

Filby. He was a man who liked to argue.

“I can prove it. They taught you that all things have shape and form, right? We measure things by how long, high, and wide they are. These are the three dimensions of space, aren’t they?”

“Correct,” said the mayor.

“Well, what about time? Clearly, any real body must also exist in time. That is the *fourth* way to measure things.”

“What? I don’t follow you,” said Filby.

“Let me explain,” said the Time Traveler. “For anything to be real to us, it must last long enough for us to know that it’s there. So there are really four dimensions. There’s only one difference between time and space. The difference is that our consciousness moves along time in just one direction—from the beginning to the end of our lives.

“Think about this: Here is a portrait of a man at 8 years old, another at 15, another at 17, another at 23, and so on. All of these are three-dimensional pictures of a four-dimensional being. In other words, this is still the same person, even though the pictures show the

man's different ages through time. Some scientists are now telling us that time is only a kind of space."

"Wait!" said the doctor. "That doesn't make sense. If time is really just a fourth dimension of space, why can't we move freely through it, as we do in space?"

The Time Traveler smiled. "Are you *sure* we can move freely in space? We can go right and left, and backward and forward. I admit that we can move freely in two dimensions. But how about up and down? Gravity limits us there."

"Not exactly," said the doctor. "There are balloons."

"But before balloons, except for jumping, we could not move up and down."

"Still, we could move a little way up and down," said the doctor.

"Easier, *far* easier, down than up."

"Well, we cannot move at all in time. None of us can get away from the present moment," said the doctor.

"My dear sir, that is just where you are wrong. We are always getting away from the present moment. We travel at the same speed

from the cradle to the grave. It is just as we would travel *down* if we began our lives 50 miles above the earth.”

The psychologist then spoke up. “There is something wrong with your ideas. We *can* move about in all directions of space, but we cannot move about in time.”

“That is my great discovery, the reason I have invited you here tonight. You are wrong to say we cannot move about in time. For instance, if I remember something very clearly, I go back to the time it happened. I become absentminded, as you say. I jump back for a moment. Of course, we cannot *stay* back for any length of time, any more than we can stay six feet above the ground. But we can go up against gravity in a balloon. Why should we not hope to stop or speed up our travel through time? And why not even turn around and travel the other way?”

“Oh, that is ridiculous!” cried Filby.

“Why do you say that?” asked our host.

“Huh! I suppose you can show black is white by argument,” said Filby, “but you will never convince *me!*”

“What if I showed you proof?” asked the Time Traveler with a twinkle in his eye.

“It would be wonderful for history teachers,” said the psychologist. “They could travel back in time and see for themselves what really happened.”

“Then there is the *future*,” said the very young man. “You could invest your money, let it grow with interest, and hurry on ahead. By the time you got there, you’d be rich!”

“But where is your proof?” asked the psychologist.

The Time Traveler smiled at us. Then he walked slowly out of the room. We heard him walking down the long hall to his lab. While he was gone, Filby started talking about a magic show he had once seen. Before he finished, however, the Time Traveler had returned.

The thing he held in his hand was a shining metal form. It was about the size of a small clock, and very delicate. Some parts of it looked like glass.

He set it on a table in front of the fire. Then he drew up a chair and sat down. We were all looking at the model very closely.

Even now it seems impossible that any kind of trick could have been played on us under these conditions.

“This is only a model,” said the Time Traveler. “It is my plan for a machine to travel through time.”

The doctor looked closely at the thing. “It’s beautifully made,” he said grudgingly.

“It took two years to make,” said the Time Traveler. He pointed to a seat on the machine. “This is where the time traveler will sit. When I press this white bar forward, the machine will go into the future. The other bar will send it into the past. When I press down on the white bar, it will be gone forever. That’s because there is no one on it to bring it back. Have a good look at it. Look at the table, too, and be sure that I am playing no trick. I don’t want any of you to say that I fooled you.”

We were all quiet for a moment. Then the Time Traveler reached toward the bar. “No,” he said suddenly. “Give me your hand.” He took the psychologist’s hand in his own and had him press the bar. So it was the psychologist himself who sent the model on its voyage. The machine

began to glow. There was a breath of wind, and the lamp flame jumped. One of the candles on the mantel was blown out. The little machine glittered for a moment. Then it seemed as if we could see through it. Suddenly it was gone—vanished! Except for the lamp, the table was bare.

Everyone in the room was silent for a minute. “Well?” asked the Time Traveler.

“Do you mean to say that the machine has traveled in time?” asked the doctor.

“Yes,” said the Time Traveler. “What is more, I have a big machine nearly finished. When it is put together, I plan to have a journey of my own.”

“Do you really think that machine has gone into the future?” said Filby.

“Into the future or the past. I don’t know which for certain. Would you like to see the Time Machine itself?” asked the Time Traveler. Without waiting for an answer, he took up the lamp and led us to his lab.

There we saw a larger model of the one that had disappeared. But this one wasn’t finished.

“Look here,” said the doctor. “Are you really serious? Or is this a trick—like that ghost you



showed us last Christmas?”

“I plan to explore time on that machine,” said the Time Traveler. “Isn’t that plain? I’ve never been more serious in my life.”

None of us knew quite how to take it.

I caught Filby’s eye over the doctor’s shoulder. He gave me a wink!