

TOM'S TIME TRAVEL

There is a whole bunch of stories about time traveling. Usually they are about lunatic professors, building the silliest machines, screwing onto them the funniest gadgets and knobs and attaching the strangest looking wires. Maybe some of those professors hope to go back to the time of the Indians. Or maybe even further back to meet an actual dinosaur!

Why is it, that people want to go to another time? It's like they don't care too much about this one. Anyway, many have perished in the attempt, when their constructions exploded at take-off.

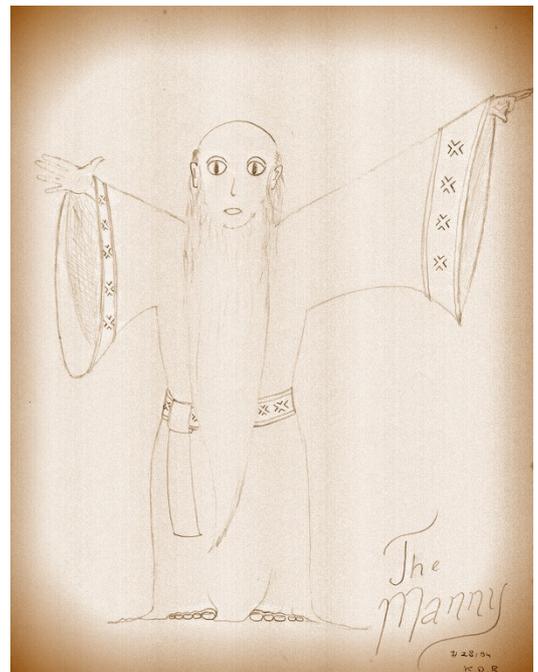
Did you ever think of getting on a time machine? Tom never did. Still... the craziest things keep happening to Tom.

Tom had a little sister called Mary. And as brothers and sisters do, they too, often fought each other like cats and dogs. They fought because one was teasing the other. They fussed because one of them was doing something he or she wasn't supposed to, and the other told. Oh, yes! They squabbled over all kinds of things!

One time, the fight had been about who got the most cookies during snack time, after school. Tom thought that his baby sister had gotten a great deal more than her fair share. You can imagine him not being all too happy about this. Since it meant, very probably, that he had gotten less.

Brooding, scheming, Tom went to the park afterwards. Do you know what he had with him? With the utmost stealth and cunning he had been able to sneak out the brand-new pack of cookies his mother had bought that very morning. By some play of fortune, they were his sister's favorite: Delicious, freshly made fudge cookies. This would add a special flavor to Tom's little scheme. He planned to have the fudge delights all by himself, you see! His sister wasn't going to get any of these cookies. Oh, no!

Tom sat down under a large oak tree, behind some bushes, thinking -as he might- that no-one would disturb him there. He started to stow away the fudge



delicacies with genuine relish and was well eating his way to a sure stomach-ache. Half of the cookies had vanished already and they weren't tasting half as good as before! Then someone showed up. Or popped up. Because he was very suddenly there. Sort of like: "POP!"

It was a bearded, crinkled figure, just barely bigger than Tom. His feet-touching beard and his gown were the blinding white you only see when you look straight up into the sun. The rest of his head didn't show a single hair. Not even a gray one.

This "manny", because he wasn't a man, Tom thought, no: Too small! This manny did not waste time on introductions:

"I think your sister would like a bit of those, too!" he croaked, in a wisely, suggestive tone. He had a thin, creaky voice.

Tom stared at him with wide-open eyes. Not because, think about it, it was quite peculiar that the manny - Tom had never seen before! - knew about him having a sister! No, Tom stared because the anger he had felt around lunch, when he had been fighting with his sister, now returned full-force! And the next minute Tom muttered and sputtered, stumbling and tumbling over words in his haste to explain to the manny why he was eating the cookies by himself. Tom had so much to say about the matter that he didn't know where to start properly, so in the end he just kept quiet.

The manny had been nodding to himself quietly, as if he understood completely. Then, without saying a single word, he slowly raised his long-sleeved arms and gestured mysteriously in the air, pointing his fingers this way and then that, making signs of some sort.

All of a sudden, a translucent, that is; look-through ball appeared. It hovered beside the manny, just above the ground. Its surface trembled, just like that of a water bubble. At a head-nod from the manny in Tom's direction, the bubble floated forward. Tom was scooped up by it and suddenly found himself on the inside of this bubble. At first Tom was too surprised to get all panicky about it and the next second he couldn't react anymore. The bubble closed itself around Tom; its sides became a different mass of deep, dark, impenetrable metal that turned the bubble pitch and pitch dark inside.

Only a few light-giving numbers remained, hanging high over Tom's head, as if suspended in the air: 2.0.0.9. That was this year! Tom realized. And as soon as he had he thought it... With a “PLINK!” these numbers started changing like crazy: 2009, 2010, 2011... As they flashed before Tom’s eyes faster and faster, Tom's stomach felt weird, like he was flying in an airplane, and of course he had eaten way and way too much! He was getting a bit dizzy, too, so he had to stop looking at the flashing numbers. He sat down as best as one could do on the inside of a bubble.

A metal “TINK!” sounded and when Tom looked up, he saw that the numbers had stopped changing at 3555. Tom didn't even have time to think about what was going to happen now, because he saw that things were lighting up around him.

Yes! The bubble was disappearing. It first turned blue and then grey, and it kept on fading until it was at last completely gone.

As this had happened in one and the same instant, Tom fell to the ground with a thump. He got up, rubbing his painful behind.

WHERE WAS HE?

It was day, as far as Tom could tell, anyway. And in the light of that day, he observed that he was standing on some sort of pebble road. And there were several domes along the length of it on either side and further inland. Funny, those giant balls sticking halfway out of the earth. They looked a bit like igloos; those snow houses Eskimos live in on the North Pole. Except it wasn’t cold at all.

Tom may have thought that he had arrived in some kind of city, for there were domes high and wide; yes, multi-colored domes, small and large, as far as the eye could see. It was a strange experience, because there was not a living soul in sight! Yet... in the distance, up the road, something could be spotted moving.

Tom naturally went that way, as his curiosity drove him. Perhaps a human being he encountered could tell him what was going on.

As he came closer, he saw them more clearly. They were standing in a line. But were they people? Tom had serious trouble believing that. Oh, there were young ones, and old ones, tall ones and fat ones, just like there are young, old, tall and fat people! But see, they were green!

Oh, maybe not really green. More sort of a blue-green.

And their hair! Long, silver strands, undisturbed by a single curl, hanging over their shoulders and down their backs.

Their clothes were weird, too. If you could call them clothes. They looked very much like a metal plated bikini. And everybody was wearing them, along with some calf-high silver-colored boots.

"It must be pretty boring to shop here." Tom thought.

If there was a need to shop at all. Maybe they didn't even have to buy their food in a store. It seems that food was what they were standing in a line for.

Tom could see that there was a small dome at the end of the line. The "greenies" went in on the one side, to come out the other. All of those coming out of the little dome were holding a tray. The grey mush on these trays could only be food. Tom, at least, couldn't imagine it to be anything else.

"I wonder if they eat that every day." he thought.

Tom was just about to ask, when he realized that nobody was paying any attention to him.

So he dutifully set himself to the task of getting their attention.

"HEY!" he yelled, "HEY!" he waved, walking up and down the line of greenies. He danced. He clapped his hands in their faces.

Nothing! Zip. No reaction whatsoever.

"Can't you hear me?" he asked, "Don't you see me?"

And Tom soon stopped because it was obvious now to him that they clearly did not. He might just as well have been invisible.

Discouraged, Tom plumped down on a large round boulder next to the road. Wondering what to do next, he kept looking at the greenies, going in and coming out.

There was this elderly, pathetic manly greenie, who came out carrying a considerable load of mush on his tray. Immediately after him followed a strong and healthy looking youngster. The meal on his tray only half matched that of the old greenie before him. Tom watched the young greenie comparing the meals, looking first at his own and then at the much larger heaps of mush on the tray of the elder, and then back again.

He started to make loud noises of protest. Tom, of course, couldn't understand what he was saying exactly, but he had a pretty good idea.

The youngster was now threatening as well, shaking his fist at the old greenie. With a quick movement, he let go of his tray. From a small case attached to his belt, he produced a long, thin metal object.

"They have weapons!" Tom thought.

And so it was! The thing, not looking like anything but a metal stick, was aimed at the older greenie, who hastily dropped his tray and went for his own weapon. Soon two blinding blue rays, produced by the sticks, shot through the air. When the rays touched each other, both greenies shuddered and then suddenly exploded, although there was not a sound to be heard. Both soundlessly vanished into nothingness as if they had never been.

Tom had followed these alarming developments closely. He had jumped up from the boulder and his mouth had fallen open till at last he had been gaping at the scene. It had happened so quickly that he wasn't able to do anything.

Because he was still just standing there; dumbfounded, trying to wrap his mind around what he had just seen, he did not notice that the bubble suddenly re-appeared to scoop him up again. The transfer back to his own time now went so breathtakingly quickly that Tom couldn't help but faint.

He woke up under his tree in the park, behind the bushes. As he stumbled to his feet, his hand hit something. It was a brand-new pack of chocolate fudge cookies. Tom quickly looked around him.

No manny. And no greenies. Just Tom, the park and some birds. He imagined it must be getting late already, so he went home.

That evening, when they were having an after-dinner snack, Tom generously encouraged his sister Mary to have another cupcake. Everybody was very surprised. His sister even suspected him of playing a trick on her.

He didn't tell anyone what had brought on this peculiar change, though. Not even when his mother wonderingly remarked that the fudge cookies she had newly purchased had mysteriously seemed to have undergone a change of wrapping.

And although Tom never once saw the manny again, he never forgot his lesson!