

The Clock Stood Still

The Clock stood still, exhausted by its frantic prancing about and cavorting here, there and everywhere.

“Phew!” exclaimed Brian, “about time too! I was getting quite dizzy trying to keep up with it.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Clock, “it is about time, ain't it? That's the trouble – it's all about time!”

“Now look what you've done,” said Brenda. “You've upset him.”

“*Him!*” exclaimed Brian, “*him!* It's a clock, for goodness' sake. It has no business gadding about like a maniac; clocks should be stationary and tell the time.”

“*Tell the Time!*” exclaimed the Clock. “*Tell the Time?* You can't tell Time anything; Time tells us. Time tells me what hour, minute, second, microsecond, nanosecond, pico.....”

“All right, all right!” said Brian, interrupting. “You should be telling us what time is telling you. You shouldn't be gadding about; come to that, you shouldn't even be speaking.”

“Oh,” groaned the Clock, “haven't you ever heard of *speaking* clocks?”

“Of course I have,” said Brian, “but they are automated machines that you contact by telephone.”

“Are you sure that they are *all* automated machines? Are you really sure?” asked the Clock.

“Well, er ..” admitted Brian, “well, I can't be sure that every single one is, of course, but”

“But me no buts,” snapped the Clock.

“Brian,” said Brenda, “do stop annoying the Clock. Look how upset he is; see how his hands are drooping.”

“Quite so,” said Brian, “he's not telling us the time; his hands are just hanging down. They should be pointing at the hour and the minute; and his second hand should be going around counting the seconds.”

“Good grief!” exclaimed the the Clock. “Where were you brought up? The hand that counts off the seconds and, indeed, the very fractions of seconds, is my *third* hand, not my second hand. My first hand follows the hours, and my second hand follows the minutes; it's my *third* hand that follows the time between the minutes.”

“Oh,” said Brian, “when I said 'second hand' I didn't mean your *second* hand but your hand that tells the seconds.”

“*Tells* the seconds – *tells* the seconds!” exclaimed the Clock. “How can you tell seconds anything? They're not things you speak to; and,” continued the Clock, “if when you said 'second hand' you did not mean my second hand, why did you say it? You should say what you mean.”

“Oh,” groaned Brian, “I give up!”

“Best thing you've said so far,” grunted the Clock.

They all fell silent. Brenda felt that there was something wrong with the silence. Then it suddenly occurred to her.

“I say, Clock,” she said. “Shouldn't you be ticking?”

“I'm exhausted,” replied the Clock. “My ticker's stopped. I couldn't tick to save my life.”

“If my ticker had stopped,” muttered Brian, “I'd be dead. It would be too late to save my life.”

“Your ticker?” queried the Clock.

“He means his heart,” explained Brenda. “Anyway, doctors sometimes manage to get hearts beating again after they've stopped. But Brian's such a misery, I don't suppose they'd bother with his.”

“Ha, ha!” said Brian.

Then, turning to the Clock, he said: “It serves you right, gadding about all over the place like you were. It's a wonder you didn't fall apart. What on earth do you think you were doing?”

“I was trying to keep up with Time,” said the Clock meekly, “but it was no good. Time flies like an arrow.”

“And fruit flies like a banana,” added Brian, collapsing with laughter.

“Oh,” groaned Brenda, “that's such an old joke. I heard it from my Dad, or was it my Grandad?”

“There are no jokes like the old ones,” retorted Brian.

“No,” muttered the Clock, “I can see originality is not Brian's strong point.”

“All right, all right,” said Brian, “Sorry I spoke.”

“I don't suppose you could help it,” said the Clock, “anymore than I can help speaking. It's what we have to do.”

“No,” said Brian, “*you* don't have to speak. All you

have to do is tell the time. Er," he added, noticing the sour look on the Clock's face, "I mean, tell us what the time is."

"Don't forget, young man," said the Clock, "that I am a speaking clock. As for 'all I have to do', let me tell you that it is hard work tracking Time, which flies so fast, and keeping you wretched humans informed. Why can't you track time yourselves?"

"Well," said Brenda, "we can sort of track time. I know when it's morning or when it's afternoon; I know more or less when meal times are due, and ..."

"Not good enough!" snorted the Clock. "I have to know to the smallest fraction of a yoctosecond, and that ain't easy."

"A yoctosecond!" exclaimed Brian, "a yoctosecond! You've made that up just to sound posh!"

"AWW!" began the Clock, whirring furiously.

"I'm afraid he hasn't," said Brenda. "If you'd paid attention in physics, you would know that a yoctosecond is a thousandth of a zeptosecond, which is a thousandth of an attosecond, which is a thousandth of a femtosecond, which is a thousandth of a picosecond, which is ..."

"All right, all right," interrupted Brian. "you've made your point."

"Yes," said the Clock, suddenly sounding cheerful. "It is all right. Young Brian's ignorance wound me up so much that I've started ticking again."

Sure enough, as they stopped to listened, the Clock was ticking steadily away and the hands no longer drooped but were showing the correct time.

"Er," said Brian, "I wound you up?"

"Yes," replied the Clock cheerily. "There's no need to wind me up again, so let's all be cheerful and bright."

"Yes, let's," agreed Brenda.

"Let's sing a song to cheer ourselves up," suggested the Clock.

"Yes, let's," said Brenda. "What shall we sing?"

"Dunno," grunted Brian. "Perhaps the Clock can suggest something, as it was his idea."

"Indeed I can," answered the Clock, and began signing as it danced:

"Fruit flies like banana splats,

“The gard'ner likes his marrow;
“Dragonflies like bugs and gnats,
“But time flies like an arrow.
“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
“For time flies like an arrow.”

“Whiteflies like their sprouts and kale,
“The old maid likes her yarrow;
“Firefly larvae like a snail,
“But time flies like an arrow.
“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
“For time flies like an arrow.”

“House flies like their rotting meat,
“The tom-cat likes a sparrow;
“Butterflies like nectar sweet,
“But time flies like an arrow.
“Sing hey for the hoe and the harrow,
“For time flies like an arrow.”

They were merrily singing this through for the second time when Brian heard a voice calling him: “Brian, Brian! Wakey, wakey, wakey!”

Brian blinked and grunted, “Er, what?”

“Wake up,” cried his mother. “What's the matter with you? You slept right through the alarm.”

“Er”, grunted Brian sleepily again as he rubbed his eyes.

“And,” she continued, “you were muttering in your sleep. Huh! time flies like an arrow indeed! You'd better fly like an arrow if you're not to be late for college again!”