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A Watch in Time

by Sue Hitchcock

A watch is always too fast or too slow. I cannot be dictated to by a watch. What is time anyway? I think it's just another place.

My father was a railway guard and had a large pocket watch to make sure the trains departed on time. It lived in his work waistcoat pocket, but I never saw him look at it. I don't think he believed in time either. Railway time is just a fiction, in which everywhere in the country has Greenwich Mean Time or the summer equivalent. This is to make sure nobody can complain the train left early. My father explained that it was forbidden to depart early, so the only options were to be on time or late, which was everyone's favourite moan. The truth is that the sun moves steadily across the sky at 15 degrees of longitude an hour. (360 degrees make a full circle in 24 hours, if you like calculations).

Even when I was fifteen I believed I was magic and could go wherever I wanted in time. I remember having a Saturday job in a shoe shop and, when bored, transporting to a later time, closing time, and I swear it was true.

Punctuality is the courtesy of kings and I believe in it. But when I was at school I was always late – just five minutes – and that was because there were overriding considerations, in the form of rather troublesome pupils from the local secondary modern school, who could steal one's hat. Not wearing it warranted a detention. If I were late, I only had to pass the stragglers.

We all visit the past, and for me it can become very real, but the future is not visible, maybe heard rumbling, and maybe we have a choice of paths ahead.

