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The Time Machine

H. G. Wells · *1895 · original English text*

A Victorian inventor tells his friends that there are really four dimensions, and that he has travelled in the fourth. He returns with a story of the Eloi and the Morlocks—of a future in which comfort has split mankind and left it prey—and of a last, dying beach under a swollen sun. Wells writes a scientific romance that is also a fable of class, ease, and the brief dream of the human intellect.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

If a society aims only at comfort, security, and ease, what becomes of strength, of mind, and of the bond between those who live above ground and those who work below?

"I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been."

The Time Traveller · After the Palace of Green Porcelain

The Traveller comes to see the Eloi as the decadent children of the owning class, and the Morlocks as the descendants of those who worked underground. Comfort has been a kind of suicide of the intellect. He saves Weena only for a time; he cannot save that world. The book leaves a warning, and a return of tenderness in the two fading flowers he brings back.

KEY CHARACTERS

The Time Traveller
The inventor-host, whose scientific pride meets a future that humbles it

The narrator
One of the dinner guests, who frames the tale and keeps the two flowers

Weena
An Eloi who trusts him, and who is lost in the fire

The Eloi
The beautiful, weakened children of ease, living above ground

The Morlocks
The underground workers and hunters, who keep the machines and the meat

The Medical Man and the other guests
Skeptics at the table, the ordinary intelligence of the present

COMFORT, AND A BRIEF DREAM

> *"There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time."*
> **The Time Traveller** · Chapter I

> *"I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been."*
> **The Time Traveller** · After the Palace of Green Porcelain

Grades 8–12
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01
The Fourth Dimension
CHAPTERS I–III

A dinner-table argument becomes a demonstration, and then a disappearance.

- The Time Traveller explains to his guests that there are really four dimensions, three of space and a fourth, Time
- He shows a small model that vanishes; a week later he comes late to dinner, exhausted and filthy
- He has been to the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand, and has a tale to tell
- The frame of skeptical friends keeps the wonder in a recognizable room in Richmond

> *"There are really four dimensions, three which we call the three planes of Space, and a fourth, Time."*
> **The Time Traveller** · Chapter I

02
Among the Eloi
CHAPTERS IV–V

A beautiful, childlike people, a lost machine, and a well in the ground.

- He finds the Eloi: slight, gentle, fruit-eating, without apparent government or toil
- The great sphinx of bronze sits over the place where his machine is hidden
- He begins to guess that this is the sunset of mankind, the outcome of a long ease
- The wells, the towers, and the night fears point to another people below

03
The Morlocks
CHAPTERS VI–VIII

A descent into the dark, and a museum of the dead human past.

- He goes down a well and finds the Morlocks, pale, nocturnal, mechanical, and carnivorous
- The Eloi are not only their former masters; they are also their cattle
- In the Palace of Green Porcelain he finds the wreck of learning and takes a few tools, including a box of matches
- Weena, a small Eloi he has saved from drowning, clings to him

> *"I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been."*
> **The Time Traveller** · After the museum

04
The Forest Fire
CHAPTERS IX–X

A night fight, a fire, and a machine recovered at a cost.

- Pursued in the woods, he lights a fire that becomes a greater fire than he meant
- Weena is lost in the night and the flames
- He gets the machine back from under the sphinx and escapes forward, then farther still
- The personal loss is not hidden by the adventure

05
The Last Beach, and Home
CHAPTERS XI–XVI AND THE EPILOGUE

A dying world, a return with two flowers, and a second departure.

- He goes far into the future and sees a still beach under a swollen, reddened sun, with the last crab-like life
- He returns to his own house, tells the story, and shows two strange white flowers as Weena's token
- The guests doubt; the narrator half believes
- The Traveller leaves again, with a small camera and a knapsack, and does not come back in the narrator's time

Time and Mortality · Class and Division · Ease and Decay · The Intellect · Pity · A Warning to the Present

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 8–12

1. The "sunset of mankind" is the Traveller's first large idea, and it is incomplete until he understands the Morlocks. Ease has a cost underground.
2. "I grieved to think how brief the dream of the human intellect had been" is the book's lament. He says the intellect had committed suicide by seeking only comfort and security.
3. Weena's two flowers, in the epilogue, are the narrator's reason not to despair of tenderness, even if the far future is bleak.
4. The hosted text is Wells's original English (Project Gutenberg #35). Chapter titles in this edition include "The Sunset of Mankind" and "The Palace of Green Porcelain."

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #35, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-time-machine/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.