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# SCIENCE STORIES

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# A STITCH IN TIME

By

Howth Castle and J. P. Caravan



*Illustration by Michael Becker*

**When you start trying to figure out a way to go back in time and clean up on the horse races, it's time to see a psychiatrist. Bosley did, and the psychiatrist solved his problem.**

IT was a pleasant morning, a very pleasant morning, the rich kind of morning that promises a gold and silver day. Doctor Nicholls squeaked his hands together in delight and rubbed them fondly over his bald head. He whirled happily in his swivel chair and hummed what may have been a tune. The expensive desk glittered in the gay sunshine; the expensive clock struck ten.

"Time is money," cried Doctor Nicholls to himself. "To work, to work." He pushed a button.

The expensive receptionist came into the office. "There is one patient, doctor. A new one."

The doctor's heart jumped with delight, like a trout leaping high after a golden bug. "Fine," he said. "Does my goatee need combing?"

"It's perfect, doctor."

"Good. Let's have the nut in, then."

"Doctor. . ." She stood in the doorway, hesitating.

"Well?"

"This one doesn't look rich."

"Not rich?"

"This one looks crazy."

The gold went out of the sunshine; it wasn't a pleasant morning any more. The doctor's regular patients were all plump and wealthy and sometimes a bit neurotic. Whenever someone who was less than wealthy and more than neurotic came to the doctor for help, he would have the patient committed at once. Sometimes

Doctor Nicholls lost a whole afternoon in the process.

He sighed. "All right, Martha. Send him in. You might call the State Hospital and have them reserve a bed."

"What ward, doctor?"

"How should I know what ward before I've seen the patient? The violent ward, tell them the violent ward—they're usually violent when I have them committed." When he laughed you could see the gold glitter in his teeth. "Especially the sane ones. Show him in, Martha, show him in."

In good humor again, he waited for his patient.

"Hello, Uncle Milton."

Doctor Nicholls leaped to his feet. "Bosley," he said angrily. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm crazy, Uncle Milton."

"Get out of here."

Bosley ran a hand through his dust-colored hair. "You better cure me," he said. "Suppose I went and told some of your patients what the Latin on that diploma of yours really means."

The doctor slumped back in his chair. It squeaked mournfully beneath him. "You wouldn't," he said.

"Know all men by these here presents that Milton Nicholls has fulfilled and accomplished the requirements of our faculty and has proven himself fully worthy of the honors and trusts and rights and benefits of a graduate of this school and is hereby awarded the certifi-

cate of Television Service Man, second class."

"All right," said the doctor. "All right."

"Why second class, Uncle Milton?"

"I flunked."

"Oh."

"What is it you want, Bosley?"

"I told you, Uncle Milton. I want you to cure me."

"Cure you of what?"

"I got a feeling . . ."

"Come to the point, Bosley. Don't waste my time. Time is money."

"Yeah." Bosley waved a racing form at his uncle. "That's just my problem: time and money. I got this idea a couple of years ago and now it's driven me batty."

The doctor waved glumly at the couch. "Lie down and tell me about it."

"I better stay standing up. I fall asleep if I lie down."

"Get plenty of fresh air and vegetables. Take a long trip. Goodbye."

"I can't take a trip. I got no money."

"You have no money?"

"If you cure me I'll pay you a million dollars."

"Bosley, will you tell me what you're talking about?"

"Listen, Uncle Milton. It's like this. I figured if I knew how all the horse races came out for the last hundred years or so I could really clean up. Know what I mean?"

The doctor twisted his goatee. "No," he said.

"I figured I could win every time if I just learned the winner of each race and then went back and made a bet on it."

"Went back where, in heaven's name?"

"Went back in time, Uncle Milton. I figured this all out, understand? I figured it out and then I spent the next couple of years learning them."

"Learning what?"

"I told you. I learned the results of every race in the world for the last hundred years."

The doctor looked at his nephew. "My advice to you, Bosley, is to go back in time and make your bets. Goodbye." He reached out to shake hands.

"I can't."

"You can't? You can't do a simple thing like that? Shame, Bosley. Why don't you go away somewhere and try some more?"

"That's what's driving me crazy, Uncle Milton. You got to fix me up so I can go back in time."

So for six months Doctor Nicholls wasted his golden afternoons trying to cure his nephew.

"Bosley," he said after the end of the sixth month. "Are you sure you know the results of every race for the last hundred years?"

"Sure."

The doctor took down a book. "Tell me who won the stakes at Dublin on June 16th of 1904."

"Throwaway." Bosley smiled

proudly. "Do you want the time?"

"Never mind. I had hoped you might be forgetting this absurd information."

"It's not absurd, Uncle Milton. Soon as I go back I can clean up."

"Listen, Bosley." The doctor placed his hands together and leaned over his desk. He had worked hard to reach this minute. It was his last plan. "Listen. If you really went back to 1904, would you remember the future?"

"Don't be silly, doc. How can you remember what hasn't happened yet?"

"Then how would you remember the winner?"

"I don't know, Uncle Milton. I just would. I'd just walk up to the bookie and the name of the horse would come to me."

Doctor Nicholls' eyes glittered. He leaned further over the desk. "Then how do you know you haven't?"

"Haven't what?"

"How do you know you haven't come back to *this* point in time from fifty years in the future? Look at it that way, Bosley, and

this absurd compulsion or whatever it is will vanish away. You won't want to go back to the past if you think of *this* as the past. Mental hygiene! Say these words to yourself each morning when you get up: every day in every way I'm getting further and further back. See? You said yourself that you wouldn't remember the future, didn't you?"

"Sure."

"And you can't remember the future, can you?"

"No."

"What more proof do you want?"

Bosley looked confused.

"And now goodbye, my boy. The rest is up to you. Pretend you've succeeded in your quest for the past and you'll be cured. Goodbye, Bosley, goodbye. Don't bother to come back."

Bosley went, but he came back.

He came back the next day with a satchel full of money, and he took out a million dollars and placed it on his uncle's desk.

"Thanks, Uncle Milton," he said. "You cured me. I remembered eight winners yesterday."