# **Time Pussy**

Isaac Asimov

This was told me long ago by old Mac, who lived in a shack just over the hill from my old house. He had been a mining prospector out in the Asteroids during the Rush of ‘37, and spent most of his time now in feeding his seven cats.

“What makes you like cats So much, Mr. Mac?” I asked him.

The old miner looked at me and scratched his chin. “Well,” he said, “they reminds me o’ my leetle pets on Pallas. They was something like cats-same kind of head, sort o’-and the cleverest leetle fellers y’ ever saw. All dead!”

I felt sorry and said so. Mac heaved a sigh. “Cleverest leetle fellers,” he repeated. “They was four-dimensional pussies.”

“Four-dimensional, Mr. Mac? But the fourth dimension is time.” I had learned that the year before, in the third grade.

“So you’ve had a leetle schooling, hey?” He took out his pipe and filled it slowly. “Sure, the fourth dimension is time. These pussies was about a foot long and six inches high and four inches wide and stretched somewheres into middle o’ next week. That’s four dimensions, ain’t it? Why, if you petted their heads, they wouldn’t wag their tails till next day, mebbe. Some 0 the big ones wouldn’t wag till day after. Fact!”

I looked dubious, but didn’t say anything.

Mac went on: “They was the best leetle watchdogs in all creation, too. They had to be. Why, if they spotted a burglar or any suspicious character, they’d shriek like a banshee. And when one saw a burglar today, he’d shriek yesterday, so we had twenty-four hours’ notice every time.”

My mouth opened. “Honest?”

“Cross my heart! Y’ want to know how we used to feed them? We’ d wait for them to go to sleep, see, and then we’d know they was busy digesting their meals. These leetle time pussies, they always digested their meals exactly three hours before they ate it, on account their stomachs stretched that far back in time. So when they went to sleep, we used to look at the time, get their dinner ready and feed it to them exactly three hours later.”

He had lit his pipe now and was puffing away. He shook his head sadly. “Once, though, I made a mistake. Poor leetle time pussy. His name was Joe, and he was just about my favorite, too. He went to sleep one morning at nine and somehow I got the idea it was eight. Naturally, I brought him his feed at eleven. I looked allover for him, but I couldn’t find him.”

“What had happened, Mr. Mac?”

“Well, no time pussy’s insides could be expected to handle his breakfast only two hours after digesting it. Its too much to expect. I found him finally under the tool kit in the outer shed. He had crawled there and died of indigestion an hour before. Poor leetle feller! After that, I always set an alarm, so I never made that mistake again.”

There was a short, mournful silence after that, and I resumed in a respectful whisper: “You said they all died, before. Were they all killed like that?”

Mac shook his head solemnly. “No! They used to catch colds from us fellers and just die anywhere from a week to ten days before they caught them. They wasn’t too many to start with, and a year after the miners hit Pallas they wasn’t but about ten left and them ten sort o’ weak and sickly. The trouble was, leetle feller, that when they died, they went all to pieces; just rotted away fast. Especially the little four-dimensional jigger they had in their brains which made them act the way they did. It cost us all millions o’ dollars.”

“How was that, Mr. Mac?”

“Y’ see, some scientists back on Earth got wind of our leetle time pussies, and they knew they’d all be dead before they could get out there next conjunction. So they offered us all a million dollars for each time pussy we preserved for them.”

“And did you?”

“Well, we tried, but they wouldn’t keep. After they died, they were just no good any more, and we had to bury them. We tried packing them in ice, but that only kept the outside all right. The inside was a nasty mess, and it was the inside the scientists wanted.

“Natur’lly, with each dead time pussy costing us a million dollars, we didn’t want that to happen. One of us figured out that if we put a time pussy into hot water when it was about to die, the water would soak all through it. Then, after it died, we could freeze the water so it would just be one solid chunk o’ ice, and then it would keep.”

My lower jaw was sagging. “Did it work?”

“We tried and we tried, son, but we just couldn’t freeze the water fast enough. By the time we had it all iced, the four-dimensional jigger in the time pussy’s brain had just corrupted away. We froze the water faster and faster but it was no go. Finally, we had only one time pussy left, and he was just fixing to die, too. We was desperate-and then one of the fellers thought o’ something. He figured out a complicated contraption that would freeze all the water just like that -in a split second.

“We picked up the last leetle feller and put him into the hot water and hooked on the machine. The leetle feller gave us a last look and made a funny leetle sound and died. We pressed the button and iced the whole thing into a solid block in about a quarter of a second.” Here Mac heaved a sigh that must have weighed a ton. “But it was no use. The time pussy spoiled inside 0’ fifteen minutes and we lost the last million dollars.”

I caught my breath. “But Mr. Mac, you just said you iced the time pussy in a quarter of a second. It didn’t have time to spoil.”

“That’s just it, leetle feller,” he said heavily. “We did it too doggoned fast. The time pussy didn’t keep because we froze that hot water so derned fast that the ice was still warm!”