

The time travel plumber B2/C1

If a plumber can use time travel to fix Priya's broken pipe, can her other problems be solved in the same way?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. to wade
2. insurance
3. vaguely
4. an inanimate object
5. the small print
6. chubby
7. your heart sinks
8. reluctantly

Definition

- a. you feel disappointed and lose hope
- b. something that is not living
- c. in a way that shows you are not willing to do something
- d. a little bit fat in a healthy and attractive way
- e. not clearly or exact
- f. the text in a formal agreement that is printed smaller than the rest of the text
- g. an agreement where you pay a company money, usually regularly, and they pay the costs if something bad happens to you
- h. to walk slowly and with difficulty through water

The time travel plumber — B2/C1

September 17

Priya and the plumber from TimeTech Insurance looked at her flooded kitchen. She hadn't been to the house in weeks, not since she'd moved back in with her parents to save money. Charlie's medical bills were so high, it was the only way to manage. She'd hoped to sell the house before this but, so far, no one had been interested. Someone was coming to look at it tomorrow, the first person in four months, and she desperately needed them to buy it. But no one was going to want it now. It smelled like a fish tank no one had cleaned, as if the water had been there ages – which it probably had.

'Eww!' said Charlie in disgust, holding his nose and exaggerating the way five-year-olds do. And then he started to cough, his thin body shaking with the exhausting effort of it, which made Priya feel even worse about the situation.

She'd called the plumber as soon as she saw the state of the house, just before calling her boss at the jewellery shop to say she wouldn't be working today. He was going to take money

from her wages, of course, even though she made him thousands of pounds in sales a week. Just one of those diamond necklaces would have paid for Charlie's operation, not that her boss cared.

'Do you mind if I look?' asked the plumber.

'Of course! Please, go in,' she replied. He had boots on that reached to his knees, about five centimetres higher than the water that had destroyed her kitchen. He waded through the various floating objects – everything that had been on the floor when the pipe burst – and opened the cupboard under the sink. She waited as he took a look at the pipe and whatever else was under there that usually kept water in instead of out. Then he stepped back and took a few photos of the disaster, one of them with her, Charlie and the puppy in. Charlie pulled a face, which made the shadows under his eyes look even darker, and held his nose for the camera.

'Can you fix it?' she asked. She didn't have the money to pay someone to repair the kitchen if the insurance company wouldn't do it. But TimeTech's slogan promised: *Say goodbye to every* problem you ever had!* Well, Priya definitely wanted to say goodbye to this problem.

'It's your lucky day,' he said, 'as long as the damage falls within the right time period. Now, to be sure, I'll want to go back two months. The pipe is very rusty, so it's clearly been building up a while. But I think the flooding happened six weeks ago by the look of the water damage.'

Priya shook her head in amazement. It was so hard to believe this time travel stuff was real.

'Now, let me just get some details,' he said. He had a pen and paper to make notes, not some futuristic-looking device like you might expect a time traveller to have. 'When did you sign up with TimeTech?'

'August 15,' she said, her heart sinking the moment the words were out of her mouth.

'Oh,' he said. 'That's only a month ago.'

'Oh no! Please don't say you can't fix it! I need to sell the house or I can't pay for Charlie's doctor and—' She began to cry, she couldn't help it. 'I had to take the morning off work to come here today and my boss isn't happy. He's not going to pay me, which is all I need.'

Charlie hugged her knees, and the plumber was either moved or just embarrassed as he reluctantly agreed. 'We're really not supposed to go back before the customer signed up with TimeTech,' he said. 'Mostly because it's really hard to make them believe that in the future they're going to be a customer. We tried it a few times, but it always went badly.'

'Oh. I think I'll believe you, as I'd been thinking about signing up for a while before I did,' she said. 'Say goodbye to every problem you ever had, right? I certainly have a lot of problems!' She tried to laugh but it came out wrong and she was almost crying again.

He took a few more details, shaking his head as if to make it clear what a big favour he was doing her. 'I'll be back in about half an hour to make sure you're happy with the work, OK?'

The plumber walked back to the road and disappeared into his van. It was a perfectly ordinary van, and you'd never have guessed it was a time machine. The slogan *Say goodbye to every* problem you ever had!* was painted on the side, with a * next to some smaller writing underneath that she couldn't read from where she was standing.

Obviously they couldn't wait in the disgusting, smelly kitchen, so she sat outside with Charlie. He was too tired and weak to run around, so he was watching the puppy trying to dig up the 'For Sale' sign in the garden.

She wandered closer to the van and read the small print under the slogan.

**TimeTech only solves problems involving inanimate objects. People and their actions are NOT covered.*

Ah, *now* she remembered! TimeTech had been in the news after twelve of their customers had ended up in prison. TimeTech must have added * by the word 'every' in their slogan after that.

Just as she was looking at it, the van door opened. 'All fixed!' the plumber said, smiling.

'Was I surprised to see you?' Priya asked.

'Yes! At first, but that's why the photos are so useful. People are always convinced when they see themselves in the pictures. You said you couldn't believe you were using the service so soon after signing up.'

'Let's see, let's see!' Charlie jumped up and down with a new energy.

Priya opened the house door and, just as promised, the kitchen was dry, tidy and not at all smelly.

'Wow!' said Charlie.

Priya agreed. 'It's as if the flood never happened!' she said to the plumber.

He laughed. 'It *didn't* happen!' he said. 'I put your new pipe in on 17 July and disaster was avoided, as promised. It would be more accurate to say it *un*happened – but I wouldn't worry about it. Time travel is confusing!'

Priya shook her head, still amazed at what had just happened – or unhappened.

July 17

Two months earlier, Priya was also shaking her head, amazed at what had just happened. On the face of it, of course, it was nothing out of the ordinary. A plumber had fixed a pipe in a few minutes. Except the pipe wasn't broken – yet – and the plumber had come from the future. Well, she was glad her future self was going to sign up with TimeTech. She'd vaguely heard of them before, but now she really understood the service they offered. '*Say goodbye to every* problem you ever had!*' the slogan on the van outside her house had said. There was some tiny writing underneath, but she hadn't been close enough to read it. It was amazing – solve all your problems with time travel. It was the photo from the future that had convinced her. The one that showed the flooded kitchen and Charlie looking so pale and thin. It broke her heart to see how much worse her little boy was going to get in only two months.

'I've certainly got plenty of problems,' she thought. The biggest was money, of course. Since Charlie had got ill, she'd spent all her savings on his treatment. But he still needed an operation and if he didn't get it ... She couldn't bear to think about it. Time was running out and she needed cash, loads of it. Until today, she'd thought selling the house and moving in with her parents was the only way to make Charlie better. But now, thanks to TimeTech, she had a

better solution. Stealing was still wrong, she knew that. But, anyway, her boss was horrible to her, plus he was so rich he probably wouldn't notice if a couple of hundred-thousand-pound diamond necklaces went missing. And if she did get caught, well, TimeTech could make it 'unhappen' and get her out of prison. Maybe they would help her put the jewellery back or go back in time and show her a photo of herself in prison, or whatever it was they could do. She'd seen her kitchen with her own eyes! TimeTech's insurance was the best insurance you could ever have.

September 17

As they waved goodbye to the plumber, Charlie ran back into the garden, chasing the puppy, who had found a ball in the kitchen. 'Where's the "For Sale" sign gone, Mum?' he asked. 'Did the plumber take it away?'

'Sort of,' said Priya. She watched him running around, his legs strong, his chubby face pink, and smiled. The operation had been a success. Her old worries were gone. But now that she'd read the small print on the TimeTech van, they had been replaced by a new fear – that at any moment the police would come and she would be the thirteenth person going to prison. TimeTech couldn't solve every problem. She had been crazy to imagine they could. So far, it seemed, her boss hadn't noticed the missing necklaces. She hoped her luck would last.

Nicola Prentis

Tasks

Task 1

Write the sentences in the correct group.

Charlie was ill.	Priya's house was for sale.	Priya's house was not for sale.	Priya's kitchen was ruined.
Priya had a new water pipe.	Priya had committed a crime.	Priya had money worries.	Charlie was healthy.

Before the time travel event	After the time travel event

Task 2

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
	True	False
1. Priya's boss was sympathetic to her situation.	True	False
2. Priya had to persuade the plumber to go back in time and do the repairs.	True	False
3. Priya travelled back in time with the plumber.	True	False
4. Before Priya, other people had tried to use TimeTech in a way that was not intended.	True	False
5. The photograph showed Priya that Charlie would get better in the future.	True	False
6. Priya knew what the small writing on the van said when she decided to rob the jewellery shop.	True	False
7. At the end of the story, Priya knew her boss had found out about the necklaces she had stolen.	True	False
8. At the end of the story, there is a chance Priya could go to prison in the future.	True	False

Discussion

Did you like the story? What do you think the story tells us about life?

Answers

Preparation task

1. h
2. g
3. e
4. b
5. f
6. d
7. a
8. c

Task 1

Before the time travel event	After the time travel event
Charlie was ill. Priya had money worries. Priya's kitchen was ruined. Priya's house was for sale.	Charlie was healthy. Priya had committed a crime. Priya had a new water pipe. Priya's house was not for sale.

Task 2

1. False
2. True
3. False
4. True
5. False
6. False
7. False
8. True