

# Time & Money

Screening

Thursday, September 29, 8pm



## **Time & Money**

- Advice to a Young Tradesman, Benjamin Franklin , 1748
- „Repent, Harlequin!‘ Said the Ticktockman“, Harlan Ellison, 1965
  - Excerpt from Momo, Michael Ende, 1973
  - Time is Money, Lee Falk, 1975

Benjamin Franklin

Advice to a Young Tradesman

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Advice to a young Tradesman, written by an old One. To my Friend A. B.

As you have desired it of me, I write the following Hints, which have been of Service to me, and may, if observed, be so to you.

Remember that Time is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings besides.

Remember that Credit is Money. If a Man lets his Money lie in my Hands after it is due, he gives me the Interest, or so much as I can make of it during that Time. This amounts to a considerable Sum where a Man has good and large Credit, and makes good Use of it.

Remember that Money is of a prolific generating Nature. Money can beget Money, and its Offspring can beget more, and so on. Five Shillings turn'd, is Six: Turn'd again, 'tis Seven and Three Pence; and so on 'til it becomes an Hundred Pound. The more there is of it, the more it produces every Turning, so that the Profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding Sow, destroys all her Offspring to the thousandth Generation. He that murders a Crown, destroys all it might have produc'd, even Scores of Pounds.

Remember that Six Pounds a Year is but a Groat a Day. For this little Sum (which may be daily wasted either in Time or Expence unperceiv'd) a Man of Credit may on his own Security have the constant Possession and Use of an Hundred Pounds. So much in Stock briskly turn'd by an industrious Man, produces great Advantage.

Remember this Saying, That the good Paymaster is Lord of another Man's Purse. He that is known to pay punctually and exactly to the Time he promises, may at any Time, and on any Occasion, raise all the Money his Friends can spare. This is sometimes of great Use: Therefore never keep borrow'd Money an Hour beyond the Time you promis'd, lest a Disappointment shuts up your Friends Purse forever.

The most trifling Actions that affect a Man's Credit, are to be regarded. The Sound of your Hammer at Five in the Morning or Nine at Night, heard by a Creditor, makes him easy Six Months longer. But if he sees you at a Billiard Table, or hears your Voice in a Tavern, when you should be at Work, he sends for his Money the next Day. Finer Cloaths than he or his Wife wears, or greater Expence in any particular than he affords himself, shocks his Pride, and he duns you to humble you. Creditors are a kind of People, that have the sharpest Eyes and Ears, as well as the best Memories of any in the World.

Good-natur'd Creditors (and such one would always chuse to deal with if one could) feel Pain when they are oblig'd to ask for Money. Spare 'em that Pain, and they will love you. When you receive a Sum of Money, divide it among 'em in Proportion to your Debts. Don't be asham'd of paying a small Sum because you owe a greater. Money, more or less, is always welcome; and your Creditor had rather be at the Trouble of receiving Ten Pounds voluntarily brought him, tho' at ten different Times or Payments, than be oblig'd to go ten Times to demand it before he can receive it in a Lump. It shews, besides, that you are mindful of what you owe; it makes you appear a careful as well as an honest Man; and that still encreases your Credit.

Beware of thinking all your own that you possess, and of living accordingly. 'Tis a Mistake that many People who have Credit fall into. To prevent this, keep an exact Account for some Time of both your Expences and your Incomes. If you take the Pains at first to mention Particulars, it will have this good Effect; you will discover how wonderfully small trifling Expences mount up to large Sums, and will discern what might have been, and may for the future be saved, without occasioning any great Inconvenience.

In short, the Way to Wealth, if you desire it, is as plain as the Way to Market. It depends chiefly on two Words, Industry and Frugality; i.e. Waste neither Time nor Money, but make the best Use of both. He that gets all he can honestly, and saves all he gets (necessary Expences excepted) will certainly become Rich; If that Being who governs the World, to whom all should look for a Blessing on their honest Endeavours, doth not in his wise Providence otherwise determine.

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| HARLAN ELLISON |

## “Repent, Harlequin!” Said the Ticktockman

Harlan Ellison is a genre unto himself. One of the most controversial and provocative writers of science fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, he is known for impassioned, outspoken stories that mix humor, horror, pathos, and rage in inimitably personal proportions. Though his work has been embraced by the science fiction community, little of it conforms to science fiction conventions. Ellison was a seasoned writing professional who for a decade had turned out quantities of competent commercial fiction for a variety of markets—science fiction, fantasy, crime, juvenile delinquent—when he began publishing speculative tales that challenged taboos and broke prevailing conventions in science fiction. “Repent, Harlequin! Said the Ticktockman” is a Kafkaesque parable about the dangers of individuality in a conformist society. “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” is a prescient tale of future shock in which computers became the masters of human beings. “A Boy and His Dog” has become one of the best-known stories of a postapocalyptic future, owing to its unflinching treatment of the ethics of survival. Ellison’s fiction resonated with the work of science fiction’s New Wave writers, who sought to break down the walls separating science fiction from the literary mainstream. His stories were often stylistically experimental, deeply humanist, and leavened with a social consciousness that made them important documents of their time without diminishing their power to endure. Many stories from these years were collected in *Ellison Wonderland*, *Pain God and Other Delusions*, *I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream*, *The Beast That Shouted Love at the Heart of the World*, and *Alone against Tomorrow*. *Deathbird Stories*, which culled considerably from these collections, is Ellison’s definitive short-fiction volume, a blend of light and dark fantasies, cynical quest stories, science fiction allegories, and surrealist parables all presented as invocations to the gods that define the contemporary culture. Ellison’s reputation as a renegade enhanced his editorial work on *Dangerous Visions* and *Again, Dangerous Visions*, award-winning anthologies built on stories by fellow writers that had been rejected by other markets as too controversial. Some of his most important fiction of the 1980s and ‘90s is collected in *Strange Wine*, *Shatterday*, *Angry Candy*, and *Slippage*. He is a multiple winner of the Hugo, Nebula, World Fantasy, and Bram Stoker Awards and an award-winning screenwriter whose television credits include *The Outer Limits*, *Star Trek*, and the new *Twilight Zone*. His collections *The Gloss Teat*, *The*

*Other Glass Teat, An Edge in My Voice, and Harlan Ellison's Watching* all feature essays and commentaries on film, television, and modern society.

THERE ARE ALWAYS those who ask, what is it all about? For those who need to ask, for those who need points sharply made, who need to know "where it's at," this:

*The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailors, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others—as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and officeholders—serve the state chiefly with their heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the Devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it.*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU  
Civil Disobedience

That is the heart of it. Now begin in the middle, and later learn the beginning; the end will take care of itself.

BUT BECAUSE IT was the very world it was, the very world they had allowed it to become, for months his activities did not come to the alarmed attention of The Ones Who Kept the Machine Functioning Smoothly, the ones who poured the very best butter over the cams and mainsprings of the culture. Not until it had become obvious that somehow, someway, he had become a notoriety, a celebrity, perhaps even a hero for (what Officialdom inescapably tagged) "an emotionally disturbed segment of the populace," did they turn it over to the Ticktockman and his legal machinery. But by then, because it was the very world it was, and they had no way to predict he would happen—possibly a strain of disease long-defunct, now, suddenly, reborn in a system where immunity had been forgotten, had lapsed—he had been allowed to become too real. Now he had form and substance.

He had become a *personality*, something they had filtered out of the system many decades before. But there it was, and there *he* was, a very definitely imposing person-

ality. In certain circles—middle-class circles—it was thought disgusting. Vulgar ostentation. Anarchistic. Shameful. In others, there was only sniggering: those strata where thought is subjugated to form and ritual, niceties, proprieties. But down below, ah, down below, where the people always needed their saints and sinners, their bread and circuses, their heroes and villains, he was considered a Bolívar; a Napoleon; a Robin Hood; a Dick Bong (Ace of Aces); a Jesus; a Jomo Kenyatta.

And at the top—where, like socially-attuned Shipwreck Kellys, every tremor and vibration threatened to dislodge the wealthy, powerful and titled from their flagpoles—he was considered a menace; a heretic; a rebel; a disgrace; a peril. He was known down the line, to the very heart-meat core, but the important reactions were high above and far below. At the very top, at the very bottom.

So his file was turned over, along with his time-card and his cardioplate, to the office of the Ticktockman.

The Ticktockman: very much over six feet tall, often silent, a soft purring man when things went timewise. The Ticktockman.

Even in the cubicles of the hierarchy, where fear was generated, seldom suffered, he was called the Ticktockman. But no one called him that to his mask.

You don't call a man a hated name, not when that man, behind his mask, is capable of revoking the minutes, the hours, the days and nights, the years of your life. He was called the Master Timekeeper to his mask. It was safer that way.

"This is *what* he is," said the Ticktockman with genuine softness, "but not *who* he is. This time-card I'm holding in my left hand has a name on it, but it is the name of *what* he is, not *who* he is. The cardioplate here in my right hand is also named, but not *whom* named, merely *what* named. Before I can exercise proper revocation, I have to know *who* this *what* is."

To his staff, all the ferrets, all the loggers, all the finks, all the commex, even the mineez, he said, "Who is this Harlequin?"

He was not purring smoothly. Timewise, it was jangle.

However, it was the longest speech they had ever heard him utter at one time, the staff, the ferrets, the loggers, the finks, the commex, but not the mineez, who usually weren't around to know, in any case. But even they scurried to find out.

Who is the Harlequin?

HIGH ABOVE THE third level of the city, he crouched on the humming aluminum-frame platform of the air-boat (foof! air-boat, indeed! swizzleskid is what it was, with a tow-rack jerry-rigged) and he stared down at the neat Mondrian arrangement of the buildings.

Somewhere nearby, he could hear the metronomic left-right-left of the 2:47 P.M. shift, entering the Timkin roller-bearing plant in their sneakers. A minute later, precisely, he heard the softer right-left-right of the 5:00 A.M. formation, going home.

An elfin grin spread across his tanned features, and his dimples appeared for a moment. Then, scratching at his thatch of auburn hair, he shrugged within his motley, as though girding himself for what came next, and threw the joystick forward, and bent into the wind as the air-boat dropped. He skimmed over a slidewalk, purposely dropping a few feet to crease the tassels of the ladies of fashion, and—inserting thumbs in large ears—he stuck out his tongue, rolled his eyes and went wugga-wugga-wugga. It was a minor diversion. One pedestrian skittered and tumbled, sending parcels everywhichway, another wet herself, a third keeled slantwise and the walk was stopped automatically by the servitors till she could be resuscitated. It was a minor diversion.

Then he swirled away on a vagrant breeze, and was gone. Hi-ho. As he rounded the cornice of the Time-Motion Study Building, he saw the shift, just boarding the slidewalk. With practiced motion and an absolute conservation of movement, they sidestepped up onto the slow-strip and (in a chorus line reminiscent of a Busby Berkeley film of the antediluvian 1930s) advanced across the strips ostrich-walking till they were lined up on the expresstrip.

Once more, in anticipation, the elfin grin spread, and there was a tooth missing back there on the left side. He dipped, skimmed, and swooped over them; and then, scrunching about on the air-boat, he released the holding pins that fastened shut the ends of the home-made pouring troughs that kept his cargo from dumping prematurely. And as he pulled the trough-pins, the air-boat slid over the factory workers and one hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of jelly beans cascaded down on the expresstrip.

Jelly beans! Millions and billions of purples and yellows and greens and licorice and grape and raspberry and mint and round and smooth and crunchy outside and soft-mealy inside and sugary and bouncing jouncing tumbling clittering clattering skittering fell on the heads and shoulders and hardhats and carapaces of the Timkin workers, tinkling on the slidewalk and bouncing away and rolling about underfoot and filling the sky on their way down with all the colors of joy and childhood and holidays, coming down in a steady rain, a solid wash, a torrent of color and sweetness out of the sky from above, and entering a universe of sanity and metronomic order with quite-mad cocoo newness. Jelly beans!

The shift workers howled and laughed and were pelted, and broke ranks, and the jelly beans managed to work their way into the mechanism of the slidewalks after which there was a hideous scraping as the sound of a million fingernails rasped down a quarter of a million blackboards, followed by a coughing and a sputtering, and then the slidewalks all stopped and everyone was dumped thisawayandthataway in a jack-straw tumble, still laughing and popping little jelly bean eggs of childish color into their mouths. It was a holiday, and a jollity, an absolute insanity, a giggle. But . . .

The shift was delayed seven minutes.

They did not get home for seven minutes.

The master schedule was thrown off by seven minutes.

Quotas were delayed by inoperative slidewalks for seven minutes.

He had tapped the first domino in the line, and one after another, like *chik chik chik*, the others had fallen.

The System had been seven minutes' worth of disrupted. It was a tiny matter, one hardly worthy of note, but in a society where the single driving force was order and unity and equality and promptness and clocklike precision and attention to the clock, reverence of the gods of the passage of time, it was a disaster of major importance.

So he was ordered to appear before the Ticktockman. It was broadcast across every channel of the communications web. He was ordered to be *there* at 7:00 damunit on time. And they waited, and they waited, but he didn't show up till almost tenthirty, at which time he merely sang a little song about moonlight in a place no one had ever heard of, called Vermont, and vanished again. But they had all been waiting since seven, and it wrecked *hell* with their schedules. So the question remained: Who is the Harlequin?

But the *unasked* question (more important of the two) was: how did we get *into* this position, where a laughing, irresponsible japer of jabberwocky and jive could disrupt our entire economic and cultural life with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of jelly beans . . .

*Jelly for God's sake beans!* This is madness! Where did he get the money to buy a hundred and fifty thousand dollars' worth of jelly beans? (They knew it would have cost that much, because they had a team of Situation Analysts pulled off another assignment, and rushed to the slidewalk scene to sweep up and count the candies, and produce findings, which disrupted *their* schedules and threw their entire branch at least a day behind.) Jelly beans! Jelly . . . *beans?* Now wait a second—a second accounted for—no one has manufactured jelly beans for over a hundred years. Where did he get jelly beans?

That's another good question. More than likely it will never be answered to your complete satisfaction. But then, how many questions ever are?

The middle you know. Here is the beginning. How it starts:

A DESK PAD. DAY FOR DAY, AND TURN EACH DAY. 9:00—OPEN THE MAIL. 9:45—APPOINTMENT WITH PLANNING COMMISSION BOARD. 10:30—DISCUSS INSTALLATION PROGRESS CHARTS WITH J.L. 11:45—PRAY FOR RAIN. 12:00—LUNCH. AND SO IT GOES.

*"I'm sorry, Miss Grant, but the time for interviews was set at 2:30, and it's almost five now. I'm sorry you're late, but those are the rules. You'll have*

to wait till next year to submit application for this college again." And so it goes.

The 10:10 local stops at Cresthaven, Galesville, Tonawanda Junction, Selby and Farnhurst, but not at Indiana City, Lucasville and Colton, except on Sunday. The 10:35 express stops at Galesville, Selby and Indiana City, except on Sundays & Holidays, at which time it stops at . . . and so it goes.

"I couldn't wait, Fred. I had to be at Pierre Cartain's by 3:00, and you said you'd meet me under the clock in the terminal at 2:45, and you weren't there, so I had to go on. You're always late, Fred. If you'd been there, we could have sewed it up together, but as it was, well, I took the order alone . . ." And so it goes.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Atterley: In reference to your son Gerald's constant tardiness, I am afraid we will have to suspend him from school unless some more reliable method can be instituted guaranteeing he will arrive at his classes on time. Granted he is an exemplary student, and his marks are high, his constant flouting of the schedules of this school makes it impractical to maintain him in a system where the other children seem capable of getting where they are supposed to be on time and so it goes.

YOU CANNOT VOTE UNLESS YOU APPEAR AT 8:45 A.M.

"I don't care if the script is good, I need it Thursday!"

CHECK-OUT TIME IS 2:00 P.M.

"You got here late. The job's taken. Sorry."

YOUR SALARY HAS BEEN DOCKED FOR TWENTY MINUTES TIME LOST.

"God, what time is it, I've gotta run!"

And so it goes. And so it goes. And so it goes. And so it goes goes goes goes goes tick tick tick tick tick and one day we no longer let time serve us, we serve time and we are slaves of the schedule, worshippers of the sun's passing, bound into a life predicated on restrictions because the system will not function if we don't keep the schedule tight.

Until it becomes more than a minor inconvenience to be late. It becomes a sin. Then a crime. Then a crime punishable by this:

EFFECTIVE 15 JULY 2389 12:00:00 midnight, the office of the Master Timekeeper will require all citizens to submit their time-cards and cardioplates for processing. In accordance with Statute 555-7-SGH-999 governing the revocation of time per capita, all cardioplates will be keyed to the individual holder and—

What they had done was devise a method of curtailing the amount of life a person could have. If he was ten minutes late, he lost ten minutes of his life. An hour was proportionately worth more revocation. If someone was consistently tardy, he might find himself, on a Sunday night, receiving a communiqué from the Master Timekeeper that his time had run out, and he would be "turned off" at high noon on Monday, please straighten your affairs, sir, madame or bisex.

And so, by this simple scientific expedient (utilizing a scientific process held dearly secret by the Ticktockman's office) the System was maintained. It was the only expedient thing to do. It was, after all, patriotic. The schedules had to be met. After all, there was a war on!

But, wasn't there always?

"NOW THAT IS really disgusting," the Harlequin said, when Pretty Alice showed him the wanted poster. "Disgusting and highly improbable. After all, this isn't the Day of the Desperado. A wanted poster!"

"You know," Pretty Alice noted, "you speak with a great deal of inflection."

"I'm sorry," said the Harlequin, humbly.

"No need to be sorry. You're always saying 'I'm sorry.' You have such massive guilt, Everett, it's really very sad."

"I'm sorry," he said again, then pursed his lips so the dimples appeared momentarily. He hadn't wanted to say that at all. "I have to go out again. I have to do something."

Pretty Alice slammed her coffee-bulb down on the counter. "Oh for God's sake, Everett, can't you stay home just one night! Must you always be out in that ghastly clown suit, running around annoying people?"

"I'm—" He stopped, and clapped the jester's hat onto his auburn thatch with a tiny tinkling of bells. He rose, rinsed out his coffee-bulb at the spray, and put it into the dryer for a moment. "I have to go."

She didn't answer. The faxbox was purring, and she pulled a sheet out, read it, threw it toward him on the counter. "It's about you. Of course. You're ridiculous."

He read it quickly. It said the Ticktockman was trying to locate him. He didn't care, he was going out to be late again. At the door, dredging for an exit line, he hurled back petulantly, "Well, you speak with inflection, too!"

Pretty Alice rolled her pretty eyes heavenward. "You're ridiculous."

The Harlequin stalked out, slamming the door, which sighed shut softly, and locked itself.

There was a gentle knock, and Pretty Alice got up with an exhalation of exasperated breath, and opened the door. He stood there. "I'll be back about ten-thirty, okay?"

She pulled a rueful face. "Why do you tell me that? Why? You know you'll be late! You know it! You're always late, so why do you tell me these dumb things?" She closed the door.

On the other side, the Harlequin nodded to himself. *She's right. She's always right. I'll be late. I'm always late. Why do I tell her these dumb things?*

He shrugged again, and went off to be late once more.

HE HAD FIRED off the firecracker rockets that said: I will attend the 115th annual International Medical Association Invocation at 8:00 P.M. precisely. I do hope you will all be able to join me.

The words had burned in the sky, and of course the authorities were there, lying in wait for him. They assumed, naturally, that he would be late. He arrived twenty minutes early, while they were setting up the spiderwebs to trap and hold him. Blowing a large bullhorn, he frightened and unnerved them so, their own moisturized encirclement webs sucked closed, and they were hauled up, kicking and shrieking, high above the amphitheater's floor. The Harlequin laughed and laughed, and apologized profusely. The physicians, gathered in solemn conclave, roared with laughter, and accepted the Harlequin's apologies with exaggerated bowing and posturing, and a merry time was had by all, who thought the Harlequin was a regular foofaraw in fancy pants; all, that is, but the authorities, who had been sent out by the office of the Ticktockman; they hung there like so much dockside cargo, hauled up above the floor of the amphitheater in a most unseemly fashion.

(In another part of the same city where the Harlequin carried on his "activities," totally unrelated in every way to what concerns us here, save that it illustrates the Ticktockman's power and import, a man named Marshall Delahanty received his turn-off notice from the Ticktockman's office. His wife received the notification from the gray-suited mince who delivered it, with the traditional "look of sorrow" plastered hideously across his face. She knew what it was, even without unsealing it. It was a billet-doux of immediate recognition to everyone these days. She gasped, and held it as though it were a glass slide tinged with botulism, and prayed it was not for her. Let it be for Marsh, she thought, brutally, realistically, or one of the kids, but not for me, please dear God, not for me. And then she opened it, and it was for Marsh, and she was at one and the same time horrified and relieved. The next trooper in the line had caught the bullet. "Marshall," she screamed, "Marshall! Termination, Marshall! OhmiGod, Marshall, whattl we do, whattl we do, Marshall omigodmarshall . . ." and

in their home that night was the sound of tearing paper and fear, and the stink of madness went up the flue and there was nothing, absolutely nothing they could do about it.

(But Marshall Delahanty tried to run. And early the next day, when turn-off time came, he was deep in the Canadian forest two hundred miles away, and the office of the Ticktockman blanked his cardioplate, and Marshall Delahanty keeled over, running, and his heart stopped, and the blood dried up on its way to his brain, and he was dead that's all. One light went out on the sector map in the office of the Master Timekeeper, while notification was entered for fax reproduction, and Georgette Delahanty's name was entered on the dole roles till she could remarry. Which is the end of the footnote, and all the point that need be made, except don't laugh, because that is what would happen to the Harlequin if ever the Ticktockman found out his real name. It isn't funny.)

THE SHOPPING LEVEL of the city was thronged with the Thursday-colors of the buyers. Women in canary yellow chitons and men in pseudo-Tyrolean outfits that were jade and leather and fit very tightly, save for the balloon pants.

When the Harlequin appeared on the still-being-constructed shell of the new Efficiency Shopping Center, his bullhorn to his elfishly-laughing lips, everyone pointed and stared, and he berated them:

"Why let them order you about? Why let them tell you to hurry and scurry like ants or maggots? Take your time! Saunter awhile! Enjoy the sunshine, enjoy the breeze, let life carry you at your own pace! Don't be slaves of time, it's a helluva way to die, slowly, by degrees . . . down with the Ticktockman!"

Who's the nut? most of the shoppers wanted to know. Who's the nut oh wow I'm gonna be late I gotta run . . .

And the construction gang on the Shopping Center received an urgent order from the office of the Master Timekeeper that the dangerous criminal known as the Harlequin was atop their spire, and their aid was urgently needed in apprehending him. The work crew said no, they would lose time on their construction schedule, but the Ticktockman managed to pull the proper threads of governmental webbing, and they were told to cease work and catch that nitwit up there on the spire; up there with the bullhorn. So a dozen and more burly workers began climbing into their construction platforms, releasing the a-grav plates, and rising toward the Harlequin.

AFTER THE DEBACLE (in which, through the Harlequin's attention to personal safety, no one was seriously injured), the workers tried to reassemble, and assault him again, but it was too late. He had vanished. It had attracted quite a crowd, however, and the shopping cycle was thrown off by hours, simply hours. The purchasing needs of the System were therefore falling behind, and so measures were taken to



accelerate the cycle for the rest of the day, but it got bogged down and speeded up and they sold too many float-valves and not nearly enough wegglers, which meant that the popli ratio was off, which made it necessary to rush cases and cases of spoiling Smash-O to stores that usually needed a case only every three or four hours. The shipments were bollixed, the transshipments were misrouted, and in the end, even the swizzleskid industries felt it.

"DON'T COME BACK till you have him!" the Ticktockman said, very quietly, very sincerely, extremely dangerously.

They used dogs. They used probes. They used cardioplate crossoffs. They used teepers. They used bribery. They used stiktytes. They used intimidation. They used torment. They used torture. They used finks. They used cops. They used search&seizure. They used fallaron. They used betterment incentive. They used fingerprints. They used the Bertillon system. They used cunning. They used guile. They used treachery. They used Raoul Mitgong, but he didn't help much. They used applied physics. They used techniques of criminology.

And what the hell: they caught him.

After all, his name was Everett C. Marm, and he wasn't much to begin with, except a man who had no sense of time.

"REPENT, HARLEQUIN!" SAID the Ticktockman.

"Get stuffed!" the Harlequin replied, sneering.

"You've been late a total of sixty-three years, five months, three weeks, two days, twelve hours, forty-one minutes, fifty-nine seconds, point oh three six one one one microseconds. You've used up everything you can, and more. I'm going to turn you off."

"Scare someone else. I'd rather be dead than live in a dumb world with a bogeyman like you."

"It's my job."

"You're full of it. You're a tyrant. You have no right to order people around and kill them if they show up late."

"You can't adjust. You can't fit in."

"Unstrap me, and I'll fit my fist into your mouth."

"You're a nonconformist."

"That didn't used to be a felony."

"It is now. Live in the world around you."

"I hate it. It's a terrible world."

"Not everyone thinks so. Most people enjoy order."

"I don't, and most of the people I know don't."

"That's not true. How do you think we caught you?"

"I'm not interested."

"A girl named Pretty Alice told us who you were."

"That's a lie."

"It's true. You unnerve her. She wants to belong; she wants to conform; I'm going to turn you off."

"Then do it already, and stop arguing with me."

"I'm not going to turn you off."

"You're an idiot!"

"Repent, Harlequin!" said the Ticktockman.

"Get stuffed."

SO THEY SENT him to Coventry. And in Coventry they worked him over. It was just like what they did to Winston Smith in NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, which was a book none of them knew about, but the techniques are really quite ancient, and so they did it to Everett C. Marm; and one day, quite a long time later, the Harlequin appeared on the communications web, appearing elfin and dimpled and bright-eyed, and not at all brainwashed, and he said he had been wrong, that it was a good, a very good thing indeed, to belong, to be right on time hip-ho and away we go, and everyone stared up at him on the public screens that covered an entire city block, and they said to themselves, well, you see, he was just a nut after all, and if that's the way the system is run, then let's do it that way, because it doesn't pay to fight city hall, or in this case, the Ticktockman. So Everett C. Marm was destroyed, which was a loss, because of what Thoreau said earlier, but you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, and in every revolution a few die who shouldn't, but they have to, because that's the way it happens, and if you make only a little change, then it seems to be worthwhile. Or, to make the point lucidly:

"UH, EXCUSE ME, sir, I, uh, don't know how to uh, to uh, tell you this, but you were three minutes late. The schedule is a little, uh, bit off."

He grinned sheepishly.

"That's ridiculous!" murmured the Ticktockman behind his mask. "Check your watch." And then he went into his office, going *mrree, mrree, mrree, mrree*.

»Das ist doch dieses schreckliche kleine Mädchen!« hörte sie einen rufen. »Das ist Momo!«

»Das gibt es nicht!« schrie ein anderer. »Wieso kann sie sich bewegen?«

»Sie hat eine Stunden-Blume!« brüllte ein dritter.

»Und damit«, fragte der vierte, »konnte sie die Tür bewegen?«

Der fünfte schlug sich wild vor den Kopf: »Dann hätten wir das ja auch gekonnt! Wir haben doch genügend davon!«

»Gehabt, gehabt!« kreischte der sechste, »aber jetzt ist die Tür zu! Es gibt nur noch eine Rettung: Wir müssen die Stunden-Blume des Mädchens kriegen, sonst ist alles aus!«

Inzwischen war Momo schon irgendwo in den Gängen verschwunden, die sich immer wieder verzweigten. Aber hier wußten die grauen Herren natürlich besser Bescheid. Momo jagte kreuz und quer, manchmal lief sie einem Verfolger fast in die Arme, aber immer wieder gelang es ihr zu entweichen.

Und auch Kassiopeia beteiligte sich auf ihre Art an diesem Kampf. Sie konnte zwar nur langsam krabbeln, aber da sie ja immer im voraus wußte, wo die Verfolger laufen würden, erreichte sie die Stelle rechtzeitig und legte sich so in den Weg, daß die Grauen über sie stolperten und sich auf dem Boden überkugelten. Die Nachkommenden fielen über die Liegenden, und so rettete die Schildkröte mehrmals das Mädchen vor dem fast schon sicheren Gefaßtwerden. Natürlich flog sie dabei selbst oft, von einem Fußtritt getroffen, gegen die Wand. Aber das hielt sie nicht ab, weiterhin das zu tun, wovon sie eben vorherwußte, daß sie es tun würde.

Bei dieser Verfolgung verloren einige der grauen Herren – besinnungslos vor Gier nach der Stunden-Blume – ihre Zigarren und lösten sich, einer nach dem andern, in Nichts auf. Schließlich waren nur noch zwei von ihnen übrig.

Momo war in den großen Saal mit dem langen Tisch zurückgeflohen. Die beiden Zeit-Diebe verfolgten sie rund

um den Tisch, konnten sie aber nicht einholen. Dann teilten sie sich und liefen in entgegengesetzten Richtungen.

Und nun gab es für Momo kein Entrinnen mehr. Sie stand in eine Ecke des Saales gepreßt und blickte den beiden Verfolgern angsterfüllt entgegen. Die Blume hielt sie an sich gedrückt. Nur noch drei schimmernde Blütenblätter hingen daran.

Der erste Verfolger wollte eben die Hand nach der Blume ausstrecken, als der zweite ihn zurückriß.

»Nein«, schrie er, »mir gehört die Blume! Mir!«

Die beiden fingen an, sich gegenseitig zurückzureißen. Dabei schlug der erste dem zweiten die Zigarre aus dem Mund, und der drehte sich mit einem geisterhaften Wehlaut um sich selbst, wurde durchsichtig und verschwand. Und nun kam der letzte der grauen Herren auf Momo zu. In seinem Mundwinkel qualmte noch ein winziger Stummel.

»Her mit der Blume!« keuchte er, dabei fiel ihm der winzige Stummel aus dem Mund und rollte fort. Der Graue warf sich auf den Boden und grapschte mit ausgestrecktem Arm danach, konnte ihn aber nicht mehr erreichen. Er wandte Momo sein aschengraues Gesicht zu, richtete sich mühsam halb auf und hob zitternd seine Hand.

»Bitte«, flüsterte er, »bitte, liebes Kind, gib mir die Blume!«

Momo stand noch immer in die Ecke gepreßt, drückte die Blume an sich und schüttelte, keines Wortes mehr mächtig, den Kopf.

Der letzte graue Herr nickte langsam. »Es ist gut«, murmelte er, »es ist gut –, daß nun – alles – vorbei – ist ---«

Und dann war auch er verschwunden.

Momo starrte fassungslos auf die Stelle, wo er gelegen hatte. Aber dort krabbelte jetzt Kassiopeia, auf deren Rücken stand: »DU MACHST DIE TÜR AUF.«

Momo ging zu der Tür, berührte sie wieder mit ihrer Stunden-Blume, an der nur noch ein einziges, letztes Blütenblatt hing, und öffnete sie weit.

Mit dem Verschwinden des letzten Zeit-Diebes war auch die Kälte gewichen.

Momo ging mit staunenden Augen in die riesigen Vorratsspeicher hinein. Unzählige Stunden-Blumen standen hier wie gläserne Kelche aufgereiht in endlosen Regalen, und eine war herrlicher anzusehen als die andere, und keine war einer anderen gleich – Hunderttausende, Millionen von Lebensstunden. Es wurde warm und wärmer wie in einem Treibhaus.

Während das letzte Blatt von Momos eigener Stunden-Blume abfiel, begann mit einem Mal eine Art Sturm. Wolken von Stunden-Blumen wirbelten um sie her und an ihr vorüber. Es war wie ein warmer Frühlingssturm, aber ein Sturm aus lauter befreiter Zeit.

Momo schaute wie im Traum umher und sah Kassiopeia vor sich auf dem Boden. Und auf ihrem Rückenpanzer stand in leuchtender Schrift:

»FLIEGE HEIM, KLEINE MOMO, FLIEGE HEIM!«

Und dies war das letzte, was Momo von Kassiopeia sah. Denn nun verstärkte sich der Sturm der Blüten ganz unbeschreiblich, wurde so gewaltig, daß Momo aufgehoben und davongetragen wurde, als sei sie selbst eine der Blumen, hinaus, hinaus aus den finsternen Gängen, hinauf über die Erde und hinauf über die große Stadt. Sie flog dahin über die Dächer und Türme in einer riesigen Wolke aus Blumen, die immer größer und größer wurde. Und es war wie ein übermütiger Tanz nach einer herrlichen Musik, in dem sie auf und nieder schwebte und sich um sich selbst drehte.

Dann senkte sich die Blütenwolke langsam und sacht hernieder, und die Blumen fielen wie Schneeflocken auf die erstarrte Welt. Und wie Schneeflocken, so lösten sie sich sanft auf und wurden wieder unsichtbar, um dorthin zurückzukehren, wohin sie eigentlich gehörten: in die Herzen der Menschen.

Im selben Augenblick begann die Zeit wieder, und alles regte und bewegte sich von neuem. Die Autos fahren, die



HARRY, HILF MIR! JEDE SEKUNDE KRIEGST DU ZURÜCK

LASSEN SIE MICH LOS! ICH KENNE SIE NICHT!

LÜG NICHT - EINEN GANZEN MONAT HAB ICH DIR SPENDIERT

MAN KONNTE VERSTEHEN, daß Tom verzweifelt war, fast schon in Panik. Seine Zeit wurde knapp. Um präziser zu sein: Sein Guthaben bei der Zeitbank betrug im Augenblick nur noch eine Stunde, vierzehn Minuten und siebenundzwanzig Sekunden (1 Std. 14 Min. 27 Sek.). Wenn er in dieser Zeit keine neue Einlage machte, würde sein Konto geschlossen, er würde aufhören zu atmen. Er wäre tot. – Ich sollte das vielleicht etwas genauer erklären: In diesem von

uns zeitlich und räumlich gleich weit entfernten Land gibt es ein riesiges Gebäude. Es ist das höchste und größte Gebäude des ganzen Landes. Es hat keine Fenster, denn niemand käme auf den Gedanken, hineinzusehen, und in seinem Innern gibt es keinen, der heraussehen möchte. In diesem Innern gibt es nichts als endlose Drähte, Skalen, Meßgeräte, Rechner und Schaltkreise, nicht zu vergessen, die Schaltkreisunterbrecher. Die endlosen Reihen von überein-

# IST GELD

erzählung von LEE FALK

ROTHAARIG,  
GRÜNÄUGIG UND  
LANGBEINIG...  
ES GENÜGTE,  
UM SEIN KONTO  
ENDGÜLTIG ZU  
ÜBERZIEHEN...



andergetürmten Geräten und Verbindungsdrähten klicken und summen gelassen vor sich hin. Gelegentlich hört man ein etwas lauterer KLICK, eher schon ein KLACK, wenn ein Unterbrecher eines der Konten schließt. Das ist die Zeitbank. Wie konnte er nur in diese prekäre Situation kommen und sein Guthaben so weit absinken lassen? Schlampige Buchführung, sagte er sich ärgerlich. Wie alle Welt führte auch Tom Buch über Einkommen und Ausgaben, Kredit

und Debet. Einmal im Monat kamen von der Zeitbank die Auszüge, womit man seine eigenen Angaben vergleichen konnte. Doch er hatte dies lange Zeit vernachlässigt. Er hatte immer ein ordentliches Polster auf seinem Konto gehabt. Es war nicht so reichlich wie das von Harry oder Dick, doch es garantierte einige Sicherheit. Einmal allerdings war sein Guthaben auf weniger als zwei Tage abgefallen (47 Std. 54 Min. 13 Sek.). Damals hatten sämtliche

ILLUSTRATION: FRED FREDERICKS

Alarmsirenen aufgeheult. Doch es war ihm gelungen, Dick ein Paket Ölaktien zu verhöckern. Es war ein großes Paket und gut für etwas mehr als vier Monate (4 Mon. 3 Tg. 7 Std. 12 Min. 19 Sek.).

Pech, daß die Aktien nicht hielten, was er sich versprochen hatte. Doch so ist das nun mal. Ohne Risiko auch kein Gewinn. Eine alte Geschichte. Doch jetzt: 1 Std. 14 Min. 27 Sek. Wie konnte das nur geschehen? War es dieses Mädchen mit dem scharlachroten Haar und den smaragd-farbenen Augen?

Als die Gründerväter dieses Landes, alles ehrbare Kaufleute, einen Wahl-spruch suchten, der das Große Staats-siegel, das Grüne Banner mit den Geld-scheinen zieren sollte, da einigten sie sich schließlich ohne Gegenstimme auf jene Worte, die ihrer tiefsten philosophischen und religiösen Überzeugung am besten Ausdruck verliehen: Zeit ist Geld. Auf dieser Basis errichteten sie eine mächtige Nation. Mütter flüsterten sie den Babys in die Ohren, während sie ihnen die Brust gaben. Jungfrauen seufzten und stöhnten sie in der Hochzeitsnacht. Junge Männer trugen sie auf ihren Fahnen ins feindliche Feuer. Schiffbrüchige Seeleute gurgelten sie, wenn sie zum drittenmal hinabgezogen wurden. Zeit ist Geld.

Tom stürzte in Dicks Büro. Glücklicher-weise lag es direkt neben dem seinen. Dabei versuchte er sich zu erinnern. Jene Nacht, das Mädchen mit dem scharlach-roten Haar und den Smaragdaugen? Was war geschehen? Was, wenn Dick nicht da war? Doch glücklicherweise war er da.

„Dick, alter Freund, Zeit, daß wir wie-der einmal die Flagge zeigen“, begrüßte ihn Tom so herzlich wie er nur konnte, während ihm der Schweiß auf der Stirn und unterm Kragen brannte. Dick sah ihn prüfend an. Das heißt: Eigentlich hob er nur die Augenbrauen. Dick wußte, was die herzliche Begrüßung und der Schweißausbruch zu bedeuten hatten.

„Ich habe etwas ganz Besonderes für dich, wirklich außerordentlich, eine ein-malige Chance“, strahlte Tom, während er in seinem Aktenköfferchen kramte, un-schlüssig, welchen Umschlag er heraus-ziehen sollte. Dick beobachtete ihn kalt. Er schien keineswegs besonders scharf auf diese Gelegenheit zu sein. Doch er ließ ihm Zeit. Tom warf einen Blick auf den Umschlag, den er schließlich herauszog. Nicht schlecht.

„Eine Uranmine, pures, reines Uran, eine Sensation, fabelhaft.“

„Du hast mir bereits letzten Monat davon erzählt“, sagte Dick.

„Tatsächlich? Und was sagtest du?“

„Nein.“

„Oh.“

Tom griff erneut in das Köfferchen. „Das wollte ich dir eigentlich auch gar

nicht anbieten. Hier ist es. Eine neue und billige Methode, Polonium aus Meerwas-ser zu gewinnen. Eine Goldmine. Phan-tastisch.“

„Ich bin nicht interessiert, Tom.“

„Dick, ich brauch' einen schnellen Verkauf.“

„Die Ölaktien, Tom.“

„Aber ich konnte doch nichts dafür. Ich habe dabei ebenfalls verloren. Dick, gib mir eine Chance.“

„Tut mir leid“, sagte Dick.

„Dick, ich bin fast auf dem Nullpunkt. Leih mir ein bißchen. Eine Woche.“

„Eine Woche?“ Er lachte auf eine Weise, die Nein bedeutete.

„Zwei Tage. Bitte, Dick.“

„Ich bin kein Verleiher. Wende dich an Harry.“

„Ich habe bereits Schulden bei Harry.“

„Ich habe jetzt zu tun. Zeit ist Geld. Leb wohl, Tom.“

„Dick.“

„Leb wohl.“

Die Gründerväter, alles ehrbare Kauf-leute, hatten in ihrer Klugheit voraus-gesehen, daß die große Mehrheit der Be-völkerung ihres Landes nicht fähig sein würde, ihre geschäftlichen Angelegenhei-ten ohne Anleitung von oben in Ordnung zu halten. Und der cleveren kleinen Min-derheit, die dabei keine Schwierigkeiten hatte, durfte man noch weniger trauen. Sie richteten also eine Zentralbank ein, um alle Vorgänge kontrollieren zu kön-nen. Die ehrbaren Väter experimentier-ten zunächst mit den verschiedenartig-sten Kreditierungsmethoden auf nationa-ler Basis. Sie benützten dazu Kreditkar-ten und -marken sowie andere Ausweise, doch das allgemeine Durcheinander ließ sich damit nicht eindämmen. Durch Irr-tum, Mißbrauch, Verlust und Diebstahl entstanden große Schäden. Erst als die großartige Konzeption der Zeitbank ver-wirklicht wurde, nahm das Chaos ein Ende. Mit Hilfe des erstaunlichen Fort-schritts auf elektronischem Gebiet, ver-gleichbar nur mit den Erfolgen der Raum-fahrttechnik, gelang es schließlich, dem geheiligten Motto Geltung zu verschaffen. Von nun an war Zeit wirklich Geld.

Parallel zum elektronischen gab es auch auf biologischem Gebiet einen gro-ßen Fortschritt. Es gelang, die für den Alterungsprozeß verantwortlichen Viren zu isolieren und ein Antibiotikum zu ent-wickeln (es bestand aus Wasser, Luft, Erde und Feuer). Das Altern konnte damit so sehr verlangsamt werden, daß man es kaum noch bemerkte. Das führte natürlich zu neuen Problemen, vor allem zur Gefahr der Überbevölkerung. Die ehrbaren Kaufleute machten sich Ge-danken über das Pro und Kontra. Auf der einen Seite ein erhöhter Bedarf an Gütern und Dienstleistungen, auf der anderen

Überbevölkerung und Chaos. Doch auch dieses Problem konnte, wie so viele an-dere, durch die Einrichtung der Zeitbank gelöst werden.

Toms persönliches Problem wuchs mit jeder Sekunde. Er eilte in Harrys Büro, wo man ihn vierzehn unbezahlbare Minuten lang beim Empfang warten ließ (14 Min. 8 Sek.). Während er voller Angst und Verzweiflung auf der harten Bank saß, versuchte er aufgeregt Klarheit in seine Gedanken zu bringen. Was hatte sein Guthaben so sehr in Mitleidschaft gezogen? Hatte vielleicht die Zeitbank einen Fehler gemacht? Das war unwahr-scheinlich, doch von Zeit zu Zeit liefen Gerüchte um, daß irgendein Schaltkreis versagt hatte. Er tat so, als ob er sich am rechten Ohr kratzen wollte. Dabei drückte er beiläufig mit Daumen und Zeigefinger auf das Ohr läppchen und wartete. Über ein winziges Gerät, das im inneren Ohr eingepflanzt war, erklang eine unpersönliche Stimme. Sie war so leise, daß nur er sie hören konnte, eine Stimme, leise wie ein Gedanke.

„Einundfünfzig Minuten, dreiundvier-zig Sekunden.“ Ping.

Das abschließende Geräusch kam von einer winzigen Glocke, die das Ende der Durchsage markierte. Als ob er sein Haar zurückstreichen wollte, drückte er noch einmal verstohlen auf das rechte Ohr-läppchen, dann noch einmal und noch einmal. Damit wählte er ein Überwa-chungsgerät an, das sein Konto überprü-fen sollte. Diese Sonderanfrage kostete ihn ganze zwei Minuten. Er wartete. Dann ertönten drei sanfte Pings. Aus-kunft des Überwachers.

„Es folgt Überprüfungsergebnis von T-798324-X7: neunundvierzig Minuten, neununddreißig Sekunden.“ Ping.

Voller Verzweiflung verkrampften sich seine Hände. Es schien keinen Zweifel mehr zu geben über seinen Kontostand. Seine letzte Hoffnung war nun eine An-frage beim Oberrevisor, doch das würde ihn zehn Minuten kosten. Was war nur mit Harry los? Er ging zum drittenmal hinüber zum Schreibtisch der Empfangs-dame. Das rothaarige Mädchen blickte ziemlich verärgert auf.

„Sie müssen warten, bis Sie an der Reihe sind. Er weiß, daß Sie da sind.“

Er wurde von dem halben Dutzend Männer und Frauen, die mit ihm war-teten, nicht aus den Augen gelassen. Sie sahen alle recht ängstlich und verzweifelt aus. Alle waren sie gekommen, um von Harry zu borgen. An der Wand hing eine große Uhr. Ihr lautes Ticken war das einzige Geräusch im Raum. Die Warten-den zählten nervös die Sekunden. Tick-tick-tick. Beide Hände im selben Rhyth-mus auf den Knien auf- und abbewegend,

(Bitte lesen Sie weiter auf Seite 122)

## ZEIT IST GELD (Fortsetzung von Seite 118)

verfolgte ein Mann die vergehende Zeit. Eine Frau nickte dauernd mit dem Kopf, eine andere klopfte den Rhythmus mit dem Fuß. Sie waren hier, weil sie Zeit brauchten. Gelegentlich griff eine Hand verstohlen zum Ohrläppchen. Dann der starre Blick des Lauschenden bei der Durchsage, die nur er hören konnte. Alle taten so, als ob sie nichts bemerkten, doch ohne Erfolg. Jeder hörte in sich die leise Stimme und dann das Ping. Wurde einer hineingerufen, so verfolgten ihn die Zurückbleibenden mit feindseligen Blicken. Würde er mit denselben Argumenten um Sympathie und Zeit flehen und ihnen damit ihre Chance rauben? Oder würde er sich mit weniger zufrieden geben?

Die rothaarige Empfangsdame erinnerte Tom wieder an jene Nacht. An das Mädchen mit dem scharlachroten Haar und den Smaragdaugen. Jene Nacht im Motel. Sie stand hinter der Bar. Das schönste Mädchen, das er je gesehen hatte. Zumindest kam es ihm so vor in jener Nacht, sie in einem Kleid, das nichts verbarg, und dazu jede Menge Drinks für beide. Sie war so süß, so verführerisch, so weich und sanft. Was war geschehen in dieser Nacht? Seine jetzigen Probleme hatten ganz offensichtlich dort ihren Ursprung. Doch er tappte im Nebel, konnte sich kaum an etwas erinnern. Hatte er mit ihr geschlafen? Doch, ja, weich und sanft... Aber was war dann?

„Sie können hingehen, Sir.“

Er war so in seinen Träumereien versunken, daß sie ihre Aufforderung wiederholen mußte. Er sprang auf und eilte ins Büro.

Harry saß hinter seinem Schreibtisch. Er erhob sich nicht, wie er es früher getan hatte, wenn sein alter Freund Tom ihn besuchte. Jetzt kam Tom ja auch als Bittsteller. Harry war ein Verleiher. Und die Augen eines Verleihers sind kalt.

„Ich bin in Schwierigkeiten, Harry.“

Harrys Augen wurden noch kälter.

„Ich bin ziemlich knapp.“

„Nicht das erstmal.“

„Aber so schlimm war es noch nie. Ich bin sehr knapp, Harry.“

„Du schuldest mir bereits etwas, Tom. Du bist ein zu großes Risiko. Du schuldest mir vier Wochen plus Zinsen. Ein Totalverlust. Ich muß dich abschreiben.“

„Mich abschreiben? Aber ich werde dir doch jede Sekunde zurückzahlen.“

„Ein Totalverlust.“

Jetzt waren Harrys Augen wieder völlig kalt. Er drückte auf das Sprechgerät. Das Mädchen im Vorzimmer meldete sich.

„Ja, Sir?“

„Der Nächste.“

„Harry.“

122 Harry schüttelte den Kopf. Ein großer,

angespannt wirkender Mann kam herein.

„Harry, ich bitte dich.“

„Leb wohl, Tom.“

Harry faltete die Arme vor der Brust. Tom stand auf und verließ das Büro. Harrys kalte Augen verfolgten ihn, bis sich die Tür geschlossen hatte. Leb wohl, Tom. Tom ging wie betäubt durch das Empfangszimmer. Er sah weder das rothaarige Mädchen noch die ängstlichen Gesichter der Wartenden. Er trat auf die Straße und lehnte sich gegen eine Wand, den Magen in vollem Aufruhr. Harry hatte ihn fallenlassen. Hastig drückte er auf das rechte Ohrläppchen.

„Neununddreißig Minuten, elf Sekunden.“ Ping.

Er konnte keinen klaren Gedanken mehr fassen. Er brauchte unbedingt einen Drink. Direkt neben Harrys Bürohaus gab es eine kleine elegante Bar. In den guten alten Zeiten hatten er und Harry hier häufig ein paar gehoben. Die Bar wurde vor allem von gut situierten Geschäftsleuten besucht, die sich ohne weiteres 30 Minuten für einen Whisky oder drei Stunden für eine Flasche importierten Champagner leisten konnten, um einen Abschluß zu feiern. Tom setzte sich auf einen der Hocker an der Bar und bestellte einen Whisky. 30 Minuten. Er kippte ihn hinunter und bestellte einen neuen. Der Barmann, der ihn kannte, grinste ihm zu. Auch den zweiten kippte er auf einen Zug. Dick und Harry, seine beiden besten Freunde, ließen ihn einfach fallen. Ein schönes Paar. Diese verdammten Snobs mit ihrem geerbten Reichtum. Dick mit über 20 Jahren von seinem Vater, Harry mit über 50 von seinem Großvater: Mit diesem Kapital betrieb er auch sein Zeitverleih-Institut. Er bestellte noch einen Whisky und kippte ihn ebenfalls auf einen Zug. Der Barmann hob erstaunt die Augenbrauen.

Der Alkohol entspannte ihn so weit, daß er wieder denken konnte. Die Uhr über der Bar. Tick-tick-tick. Was jetzt? Es mußte doch einen Ausweg aus dieser Sackgasse geben, irgendeine Überlebenschance. Tick-tick-tick. Wie die Uhr in Harrys Vorraum. Das rothaarige Mädchen. Die Bar, die vielen Flaschen, Gelächter, Stimmen. Plötzlich war die Erinnerung wieder da. Er wurde von ihr überflutet, als ob irgendwo ein Damm gebrochen wäre. Eine andere Bar. Eine andere Rothaarige. Scharlach und Smaragd. Jene Nacht im Motel. Was hatte er ihr für jene Nacht bezahlt? Normalerweise gab man einem Mädchen zwei Stunden für seine Gefälligkeiten. Vielleicht vier Stunden, wenn man Sonderwünsche hatte, und im äußersten Fall 24 Stunden, wenn es etwas ganz Außerordentliches war.

Das war sie. Etwas Besonderes und Außerordentliches. Ja, das war dieses Mädchen! Mach dich auf die Beine und find sie so schnell du kannst!

Er machte dem Barmann ein Zeichen; Zahlen! Der warf einen Blick auf das Registriergerät. Drei Drinks macht eineinhalb Stunden, dazu 15 Prozent Bedienung und 15 Prozent Getränkesteuer. Zusammen also genau zwei Stunden. Tom hielt seine rechte Hand mit der Handfläche nach unten über den Zahlsteller, der in die Bar eingelassen war. Senkte sich seine Hand bis zu einer Höhe von genau 2,5 Zentimeter über diese Metallplatte, würde er an dem leichten Prickeln erkennen können, daß der Kontakt hergestellt war. Dann würde er „debet“ oder auch nur „deb“ sagen, wobei die Lautstärke keine Rolle spielte. Irgendwo unter den Millionen von Drähten, Skalen und Geräten der Zeitbank würde dann sein Kontoüberwachungsgerät klicken und die Belastung verbuchen. Im selben Augenblick würde es auch noch an anderer Stelle klicken, und derselbe Betrag würde auf der Habenseite der Bar registriert werden.

Die ehrbaren Kaufleute, die dieses Land regierten, hatten es so einfach wie möglich gemacht. Sozusagen narrensicher. Zunächst war es notwendig, daß beim Abschluß eines Handels die Hand des Verkäufers und die des Käufers miteinander Kontakt aufnahmen, entsprechend der ältesten Form zur Bekundung einer Übereinkunft, dem Handschlag. Doch jetzt war es nicht mehr notwendig, daß sich die Hände wirklich berührten. Der prickelnde elektronische Kontakt konnte bereits über eine Entfernung von 25 Millimeter hergestellt werden. War auch viel hygienischer. In Geschäften oder Dienstleistungsbetrieben wie hier in der Bar, fungierte der metallene Zahlsteller als „Verkäufer“.

Doch Toms Hand blieb weiter als 25 Millimeter von der Metallplatte entfernt. Er hatte gerade noch rechtzeitig daran gedacht, daß die Rechnung zwei Stunden betrug, und er weniger als eine Stunde auf seinem Konto hatte. Der Barmann blickte neugierig auf, als Tom seine Hand zurückzog, ohne allerdings auch nur im geringsten Verdacht zu schöpfen. Die Besucher dieser Bar hatten keine Probleme beim Bezahlen einer Zweistundenrechnung. Tom grinste, wobei sein Hirn so rasch arbeitete wie die Meßgeräte der Zeitbank.

„Das geht auf Harry, es dreht sich um eine Wette“, sagte er zum Barmann, wobei ihm sogar ein Lächeln gelang, während er sich von seinem Hocker schob. Der Barmann nickte. Er kannte Tom. Und er kannte Harry. Sie waren Männer, die öfter mal einen Spaß zusammen hatten.

(Bitte lesen Sie weiter auf Seite 185)



## ZEIT IST GELD

(Fortsetzung von Seite 122)

Tom hatte es jetzt eilig. Trotz seiner Verzweiflung amüsierte ihn der Gedanke, daß es ihm gelungen war, dem alten Harry noch eins auszuwischen. Er ging sehr rasch. Dann begann er zu laufen. Hatte er wieder denselben Fehler gemacht? Er hatte schon immer gern ein wenig geprahlt. Was hatte er in seiner Trunkenheit dem Mädchen gegeben?

Plötzlich erinnerte er sich daran, und es war, als ob ein riesiger Gong in seinem Schädel dröhnte. Einen Monat, nicht einen Tag oder eine Woche, einen ganzen Monat seines kostbaren Zeitschatzes hatte er ihr gegeben. Oh, mein Gott, einen Monat! Er rannte schneller. Das Motel war nicht mehr weit. Er würde sie finden, und er würde es zurückbekommen, das meiste davon. Zumindest 29 Tage. Oder er würde so lange diesen weichen Hals würgen, bis die Smaragdaugen hervorsquellen.

In seiner Trunkenheit hatte er sich zu einer Tat verleiten lassen, die jetzt sein Weiterleben gefährdete. Lediglich um seine Prahlucht und sein Verlangen nach jenem Körper zu befriedigen, hatte er aus einer idiotischen Laune heraus alles aufs Spiel gesetzt. Und sein Bewußtsein hatte sich so sehr über sein Verhalten geschämt, daß es alles aus der Erinnerung verdrängt hatte. Doch jetzt war der Damm gebrochen. Bitter und peinigend kam ihm das ganze Ausmaß seiner Dummheit wieder ins Bewußtsein. Ja, jetzt war er sicher. So war es. Er konnte sogar seine eigene Stimme hören, als er in dem von ihren Leidenschaften durchwühlten Bett ihre kleine Hand in seine heiße Handfläche preßte und prickelnd der Kontakt zustandekam, ein Prickeln, das ihn von Kopf bis Fuß erzittern ließ: „Deb... einen Monat, mein Liebling. Einen ganzen Monat, mein Engel.“ Deb, deb, deb. Er blieb abrupt stehen, überwältigt von der Erinnerung. Einen ganzen Monat für diese billige kleine Nute... Zwei Stunden hätten völlig ausgereicht. Er lief weiter. Das Motel war jetzt gleich um die Ecke. Die Zeit würde noch reichen.

Mit der Einrichtung der Zeitbank hatten die ehrbaren Kaufleute, die dieses Land regierten, mit einem Schlag die Probleme der Arbeitsmoral, des Zahlungs- und Kreditsystems und der Bevölkerungsexplosion gelöst. Arbeit schafft Zeit. Zeit ist Leben. Leben ist Zeit.

Sie machten das wertvollste Element des Universums zur Währungseinheit. Dieses Element war eigentlich schon immer der höchste Wert gewesen, doch nie zuvor war es so geschickt verwendet worden. Das Element heißt Zeit. Zeit, die in

# Geschmack kann wechseln. Die Marke bleibt Mac Baren's.

Man trinkt nicht immer denselben Wein, wechselt häufiger die Krawatte: Es gibt so viele schöne Dinge!

Deshalb bietet Mac Baren's auch für jede Geschmacksrichtung den richtigen Tabak. Vom milden Cavendish bis zur würzigen Mixture. Und das alles zu einem günstigen Preis, wie man ihn für diese wertvollen Direkt-Importe kaum vermutet.



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*Joh. Willh. von Sicken*  
THE HOUSE OF FINE PIPE TOBACCO

Jahren, Monaten, Wochen, Tagen, Stunden, Minuten, Sekunden gemessen wird. Die menschliche Lebenszeit.

Bei der Neueinrichtung des Systems hatte man jedem Erwachsenen höchst raffinierte Mikrogeräte implantiert, und von diesem Zeitpunkt an wurden auch jedem Neugeborenen Geräte dieser Art eingepflanzt. Diese winzigen Apparaturen konnten sowohl Botschaften empfangen wie auch weitervermitteln, so daß jeder Mensch in diesem Land dauernd in Kontakt mit der Zeitbank stand. Jeder verfügte von nun an über ein persönliches Zeitkonto bei der ZB, das individuell überwacht wurde. Dazu diente ein spezielles Zeitregistriergerät, das vom Augenblick der Geburt an jede Sekunde festhielt. Erreichte das Individuum die Volljährigkeit, erhielt es ein Jahr Zeit auf seinem Konto gutgeschrieben. Nach genau zwölf Monaten, die ZB irrte sich nie, war dann jeder beim Kampf um die Zeit auf sich allein gestellt.

Alle Löhne und Preise basierten auf Zeiteinheiten. Die Arbeitswoche (AW) entsprach 37,7 Stunden; diese etwas seltene Zahl kam durch Kompromisse und Rechenschieber zustande. Die monatliche Miete für das Standardapartment mit einem Schlafzimmer wurde beispielsweise auf 48,3 Stunden (mit Klimaanlage 52,6 Stunden) festgesetzt. Ein kleines Piano konnte man für drei Monate Debet erstehen (3 Mo. deb.): verkaufte man es, bekam man drei Monate Kredit dafür. Etc.

Es gab Millionäre, die Dekade auf Dekade häuften und bei der Zeitbank deponierten. Einige wenige Milliardäre besaßen sogar einige Jahrhunderte. Sie hinterließen sie ihren glücklichen Erben und wurden so zu Gründern von Dynastien.

Natürlich hatte die Idee der Zeitbank zuerst einige Schwierigkeiten zu überwinden gehabt. Doch die ehrbaren Gründerväter setzten sich schließlich durch. Wer hätte auch leugnen können, daß Zeit der wertvollste und durch nichts zu ersetzende Besitz des Menschen ist?

Tom erreichte endlich das Motel, atemlos und am Ende seiner Kräfte. Wie war ihr Name? Hatte er ihn überhaupt erfahren? Immerhin konnte er sie beschreiben. Es gab nicht viele, die aussahen wie sie. Sie würden bestimmt eine Liste haben, auf der ihre Postanschrift stand. Doch als er die verglaste Bar erreichte, Heureka, da war sie. Scharlach und Smaragd. Sie saß auf einem Barhocker, genau wie er sie kennengelernt hatte. Neben ihr saß ein großer Mann. Beide lachten.

„Ich muß Sie sprechen.“ Verdammte, wie hieß sie nur?

Sie schaute ihn erschrocken an. Erkannte sie ihn? Der große Mann hob die Augenbrauen. „Tut mir leid“, sagte sie.

„Sie erinnern sich?“ fragte er angstvoll. „Sie müssen sich irren“, erwiderte sie höflich, „aber ich kenne Sie nicht.“

„Wie, Sie kennen mich nicht mehr? Ich bin Tom. Ich bezahlte Ihnen einen vollen Monat“, rief er laut und erregt. Der Barman und einige Gäste drehten sich nach ihm um.

Einen ganzen Monat?

„Tut mir wirklich leid“, beharrte sie, „Sie müssen betrunken sein.“

„Verschwinden Sie endlich“, sagte der große Mann.

„Bitte... Julia“, sagte er. Wunderbarerweise erinnerte er sich ganz plötzlich an ihren Namen. „Sie müssen sich doch erinnern. Ich habe mich geirrt. Ich habe Ihnen zuviel bezahlt. Ich bin darauf angewiesen, geben Sie es mir zurück, bitte!“

„Ich heiße nicht Julia. Ich habe Sie noch nie gesehen“, sagte sie, die Augen jetzt ganz kalt. Er ergriff ihren nackten Arm und drückte ihn schmerzhaft.

„Julia, Julia, Sie sind meine letzte Hoffnung. Meine Zeit wird knapp, sie ist fast abgelaufen.“

Die Bargäste erstarrten.

„Befreit mich doch von diesem Idioten“, kreischte sie.

Der große Mann sprang von seinem Hocker und packte Tom im Genick, um ihn von ihr wegzuziehen. Tom klammerte sich an ihren Arm. Er riß sie von ihrem Stuhl, und sie stürzte schreiend zu Boden. Der große Mann und der Barkeeper zogen Tom von ihr weg und warfen ihn auf die Straße. Mühsam rappelte er sich wieder hoch. Hinter der Gastür sah er Gestalten; sie stießen Verwünschungen aus und machten drohende Gebärden in seine Richtung. Schwankend ging er die Straße hinab und lehnte sich dann gegen einen Lichtmast. Mit Daumen und Zeigefinger drückte er das rechte Ohrfläppchen. Einmal, zweimal, dreimal. Eine Anfrage beim Oberrevisor. Das hatte er noch nie getan. Es würde ihn zehn volle Minuten kosten, doch er mußte jetzt genau wissen, woran er war. Ganz genau.

Er wartete. Es dauerte länger als sonst. Dann ein sanfter Ton, den er noch nie gehört hatte... ein Klingelzeichen, ein-, zwei-, dreimal. Dann eine tiefe Stimme, auch sie hatte er noch nie gehört.

„Ergebnis der Überprüfung durch den Oberrevisor für Konto Nr. T-798324-X7: Drei Minuten, fünfzehn Sekunden.“ Dann wieder das Klingelzeichen, einmal. Und Stille. 3 Min. 15 Sek.! Panik überfiel ihn. Er sah einen Mann auf sich zukommen. Hut, Übermantel, Aktentasche. Tom trat auf ihn zu, streckte die Hand aus wie ein Bettler.

„Bitte geben Sie mir... leihen Sie mir ein bißchen Zeit. Zehn Minuten. Ich bin fast am Ende.“

Ein schreckliches Bekenntnis. Der

Mann erbleichte, wandte den Blick ab und ließ ihn stehen.

Von der anderen Seite näherte sich eine Dame in einer Pelzjacke. Tom rannte auf sie zu, streckte ihr den offenen Handteller entgegen und bettelte um den prickelnden Kontakt.

„Bitte. Nur zehn Minuten. Ich bin am Ende, wirklich.“

Die Dame holte empört Luft, wandte sich ab und ging schnell weiter. Nicht weit von ihm überquerte ein Mann in Drillich und Arbeitsstiefeln die Straße.

„Bitte, mein Herr“, schrie Tom und eilte auf ihn zu, „ich bin fast am Ende. Bitte leihen Sie mir ein wenig, irgend etwas...“

Der Mann warf ihm einen feindseligen Blick zu, murmelte etwas und ging weiter. Tom packte ihn am Ärmel.

„Sie müssen mir helfen. Ich bin am Ende. Verstehen Sie? Am Ende.“

Die Dame in der Pelzjacke und der Herr mit der Aktentasche waren in einiger Entfernung stehengeblieben und beobachteten die Szene. Tom wandte sich um und schrie so laut, daß sie es hören konnten: „Irgend jemand... irgendeiner... fünf Minuten... vier Minuten...“

Ein junges Paar näherte sich, das Mädchen mit langem blonden Haar, der junge Mann hatte eine Gitarre auf dem Rücken hängen. Von Angst und Hoffnungslosigkeit geschüttelt nahm Tom sie wahr. Er sah, daß sie gerade volljährig geworden und reich an Zeit waren.

„Bitte“, sagte er und trat mit ausgestreckter Hand auf sie zu. Das Mädchen schien erschrocken.

„Was ist los?“ sagte der junge Mann.

„Zeit... ich bin fast am Ende. Bitte helfen Sie mir“, sagte Tom. Die beiden sahen sich an.

„Macht der Witze?“ sagte der Mann in Arbeitskleidung. „Schauen Sie sich nur sein seidenes Hemd an... und den Anzug... seine Schuhe. Das ist Wochen wert. Dieser Aktenkoffer. Wenn Sie so knapp sind, dann versetzen Sie ihn doch.“

„Daran habe ich nicht gedacht“, sagte Tom und starrte auf seinen wertvollen Aktenkoffer.

„Ein Berufsbettler“, sagte die Dame.

„Wahrscheinlich wartet ein Rolls mit Chauffeur hinter der nächsten Ecke“, sagte der gut gekleidete Mann.

„Ich bin kein Bettler, ich habe noch nie gebettelt“, schrie Tom.

Das Mädchen starrte ihn an. Der junge Mann griff ungeduldig nach ihrem Arm.

„Komm doch“, sagte er.

„Warte, Lou“, sagte sie, „ich glaube, er braucht Hilfe.“

Die junge Stimme drang wie ein Lichtstrahl in Toms dichter werdende Finsternis. Er trat noch näher an sie heran und versuchte es verzweifelt mit jenem



Time is Money  
A Short Story by Lee Falk

IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE that Tom was desperate. Near panic. His time was running out. To be more precise, his account at the Timebank had a balance of one hour, 14 minutes and 27 seconds. 1 hr 14 min 27 sec. If he could not make a deposit within that period, his account would be closed. At that moment, he would stop breathing. He would be dead. Perhaps this requires further explanation.

In this land, which is far away from ours, in time as well as in space, there is a huge building in the center of the capital. It is the tallest and the widest building in the land. It has no windows, for no one cares to look in, and there is no one inside to look out. Inside, there are only endless wires, dials, meters, calculators, robot computers, circuits and, equally important, circuit breakers.

The endless rows and tiers, row upon row, tier upon tier, click and hum quietly. Occasionally, there is a louder click, more of a clack, as a circuit breaker closes an account. This is the Timebank.

How could Tom have gotten into such a predicament, to allow his account to get so low? Sloppy bookkeeping, he told himself angrily. Like everyone else, Tom kept a record of income and outgo, credit and debit, in his own bankbook. Once a month, a statement arrived from the Timebank, when you could (and should) balance your records against it. But he'd neglected this for a long time.

He'd always had a safe margin in his account. Not like Dick or Harry, but safe. Once, he had fallen as low as two days! (47 hr 54 min 13 sec.) That had been a three- alarm sweat session.

But he'd managed to sell a block of that oil stock to good old Dick, a big block good for over four months' credit (cred 4 mo 3 d 7 hr 12 min 19 sec). Too bad the oil stocks hadn't worked out. That's the way it goes. No risk, no gain. Ancient history. But now, 1 hr 14 min 27 sec.

How had this happened? That girl with the scarlet hair, the emerald eyes? When the founding fathers of this land, prudent merchants all, sought a motto to place on the Great Seal, on the Green Flag and upon the currency, they unanimously chose those words that best expressed their deepest philosophical and religious beliefs.

Time is money. Upon this base, they built a mighty nation. Mothers whispered it to babes at their breast. Maidens murmured it in the depths of their wedding beds. Youths bore it aloft on banners as they charged into enemy fire. Shipwrecked sailors gurgled it as they went down for the third time.

Tom dashed to Dick's office. Fortunately, it was next door. As he dashed, he tried to recall. That night with the girl with scarlet hair and emerald eyes? There had been so many drinks. What had happened? What if Dick wasn't in? Fortunately, he was.

He was seated behind his desk, going over his accounts. He was careful about that. „Dick, old friend, it's time to rally round the flag,“ said Tom as heartily as he could but perspiring profusely on his forehead and under his collar.

Dick looked at him questioningly. That is, he raised his eyebrows. For Dick, the hearty tone and the perspiration were clues to what was coming. „I've something special for you, extraordinary, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,“ said Tom as he rifled his briefcase, trying to decide which folder to pull out.

Dick watched him coldly. That is, he did not appear excited by the prospect. But he waited. Tom glanced at the folder he'd pulled out. Not bad.

„A uranium mine, Pure uranium, fabulous.“ „You told me about that last month,“ said Dick.

„I did? What did you say?“

„No.“

„Oh.“

Tom continued to search.

„That’s not the one I meant. This is it. A new cheap process for extracting polonium from sea water. A gold mine. Fantastic.“

„I’m not interested, Tom.“

„Dick, I need a sale, fast.“

„That oil stock, Tom.“

„I couldn’t help that. I lost on that, too Dick, give me a break.“

„Sorry.“ said Dick.

„Dick, I’m down to almost . . . nothing. Lend me a little. A week.“

„A week?“ He laughed in a way that said no.

„Two days. Please, Dick.“

„I’m not a lender. See Harry.“

„I already owe Harry.“

„I’m busy Goodbye, Tom.“

„Dick.“

„Goodbye“

The founding fathers, prudent merchants all, wisely understood that the vast majority of people in this land could not be trusted to handle their affairs without making a mess of everything. And the clever minority who could handle their affairs with no mess at all were to be trusted even less.

After establishing one central bank so they could keep an eye on everyone, the prudent fathers experimented with various sorts of universal-credit gadgets--cards, plates, tags. But confusion persisted--error, loss, theft and the like. However, when the magnificent concept of the Timebank was perfected, all confusion became impossible.

Thanks to this amazing electronic breakthrough, as revolutionary as space travel, the Sacred Motto became Reality. Time is money.

With this electronic advance, there was a parallel biological development. The viruses that cause aging were isolated. An antibiotic was developed (from water, air, earth and fire). Thus, aging was slowed so that it became barely noticeable. This created other problems, chief among them the threat of overpopulation.

The prudent merchants considered the pros and cons. Increased use of goods and services. overpopulation and chaos. This problem, like so many others, was solved by the creation of the Timebank.

Tom’s personal problem was becoming more pressing as the seconds ticked off. He rushed to Harry’s office and was kept waiting at the reception desk for 14 price- less minutes, 14 min 8 sec.

As he sat anxiously on the hard bench, his mind raced over the possibilities. What had happened to demolish his account? Had the Timebank made a mistake? Unlikely; but on rare occasions, it was rumored that a circuit had been faulty.

Pretending to stroke his right ear, he gently and casually pressed the lobe and waited. Then the impersonal voice spoke softly through the tiny device implanted in his inner ear, so softly that only he could hear, a voice as soft as a thought. „51 minutes, 43 seconds „, Ping.

The last sound was a tiny bell signaling the end of the report. Again, casually, as if brushing back the hair on his temple, he pressed the right lobe, once, twice, thrice. This was a call for a supervisor to examine the account. A special request that would cost 2 min.

He waited. Then three soft pings. The robot report. „Re account number T-798324-X7 follows 49 minutes, 39 seconds.“ Ping.

He twisted his hands in despair. There seemed to be no doubt about his account. His last recourse was to call the chief accountant. This would cost 10 min. Where was Harry?

He walked to the receptionist's desk for the third time. The red-haired girl looked at him with some annoyance. „Wait your turn, please. He knows you're here.“

The half-dozen other men and women in the room watched him warily. They all looked unhappy. They were all there to borrow from Harry. There was a large clock on the wall. Its loud ticking was the only sound in the room. All listened nervously. Tick-tick-tick.

One man kept time, his hands moving up and down on his knees. A woman marked time with a slight up-and-down movement of her head. Another did it with a foot. All were there because they needed time. Occasionally, a hand moved casually to an ear lobe.

Then the fixed stare as the listener received his report, heard only by him. And the others in the room, pretending not to notice, noticed. Each could imagine the soft voice, the ping.

And as each borrower entered the inner office, he was watched with some hostility by the others. Would that one use the same line for sympathy, ask for more time, settle for less, spoil it for them? The red-haired receptionist reminded Tom of that night.

The girl with scarlet hair and emerald eyes. That night at the motel. She was at the bar, the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. So she seemed that night. In the transparent gown. They'd had so much to drink. She had been so sweet, so alluring, so soft and smooth. What had happened that night?

The fix he was in apparently dated from that time. It was all so foggy. . hard to remember. He'd made love to her? Yes, soft and smooth. What else? „You may go in, sir.“

He was so lost in reverie, she had to repeat her words. He jumped up and rushed into the inner office. Harry sat behind his desk. He did not get up as he used to when Tom visited him, when Tom was an old friend.

Now Tom was a borrower. Harry was a lender.

The eyes of a lender are cold.

„I'm in trouble Harry.“

Harry's eyes grew colder. He waited.

„I need help. I'm short“

„Not the first time.“

„The worst time. I'm very short, Harry.“

„You already owe me, Tom.“

„I know, Harry. I intend to pay you back. With interest“

„When?“

„As soon as I can. Double interest.“

„My legal rate will be sufficient, Tom,“ he said, looking at the door as though the meeting were finished.

„Harry,“ said Tom frantically. „I'm running out of time.“

This was a dreadful confession. Even the cold lender eyes seemed startled.

„Where are you?“

„Less than an hour.“

Harry sighed and clasped his hands tightly together.

„How did you get into such a mess?“

„I'm not sure. It just happened. Harry, will you help me?“

Harry looked at his desk. Even lenders have memories. „I can't Tom. You already owe me. We have regulations“

„You're allowed exceptions. Harry, I'll pay you back. Double, triple „

„You are already a bad risk. You owe me four weeks. Plus interest. Four weeks. A total loss. I'll have to write you off.“

„Write me of? Harry, I'll pay back every sec.“

„A total loss.“

Now Harry's eyes were cold again. He touched the intercom on his desk. The voice of the girl in the outer office replied. „Yes, sir?“

„Next.“

„Harry.“

Harry shook his head. A tall man walked in, looking tense. „Harry, please.“ „Goodbye, Tom.“

Harry folded his arms. Tom got up and left the office. Harry's cold eyes watched him until the door was closed. Goodbye, Tom.

Tom walked blindly out of the reception room, oblivious of the red-haired girl and the worried faces of the others waiting their turn. He reached the street and leaned against the wall, his stomach churning. Harry had turned him down. Hurriedly, he pressed his right ear lobe. „39 minutes, 11 seconds.“ Ping.

His mind reeled. He needed a drink. There was the handy bar next door to Harry's, an elegant place. Often, in the old days, he and Harry had had a few there. A place patronized by professional types who could afford 30 min for a whiskey or 3 hr for a bottle of imported champagne to celebrate a deal. Tom sat on a stool at the bar and ordered a whiskey 30 min. He gulped it down, then ordered another. The bartender, who knew him, grinned. He gulped it down.

Dick and Harry, his two best friends, both turned him down. Two of a kind. Damn snobs with inherited wealth--Dick with over 20 year from his father; Harry with over 50 years from his grandfather, the capital behind his time-loan office. He ordered a third whiskey and gulped it. The bartender frowned. The alcohol relaxed him so he could think.

The clock above the bar. Tick- tick-tick. What now? There had to be some clue to this predicament, some hope for survival. Tick-tick-tick. Like the clock in Harry's anteroom. The red-haired girl.

The bar with bottles, laughter, the hum of voices. That brought back the memory. It came in a rush, floodgates opening. Another bar. Another redhead. Scarlet and emerald. That night in the motel. What had he given her for that night in bed? 2 hr was the usual fee for a girl, 4 hr for something special, 24 hr for someone extraordinary. She had been that. Special and extraordinary. That was it. That girl. Get out fast and find her. He signaled the bartender for his bill. The man glanced at the tab on the bar. Three drinks, 1 hr 30 min, with 15 per- cent service charge and 15 percent tax. Total, almost 2 hr. Tom moved his right hand, palm down, to the charge plate sunk in the bar. When his palm was within an inch of the metal plate, he would feel the tingle of contact. Then he would say. „Debit“ - „Deb“ was sufficient - no matter how softly.

Somewhere among those tiers and rows in the Timebank, Tom's account meter would click, registering the charge. At the same moment, another meter would click, registering the bar's credit. The prudent merchants who ruled this land made it all that simple. Foolproof.

At first, it was necessary for two hands to make contact, buyer and seller, in the most ancient form of agreement, the handshake. Now the hands of buyer and seller need not touch. The tingly electronic contact could be made across an open space of 25 mm. More hygienic that way. Or, in an establishment such as this bar, the metal plate was the seller.

But Tom's hand did not go within the 25 mm of the metal plate. He stopped before the tingling contact was made. For he realized, Just in time, that the charge was 2 hr and he had less than 1/2 hr remaining in his account. The bartender watched curiously as Tom pulled back his hand. He had no suspicion of the truth.

Customers who came to this bar had no problems with a 2 hr bill. Tom grinned, his mind moving as

fast as the meters in the Timebank. „Charge it to Harry. We have a bet,“ he said, managing a grin as he slid off the bar stool. The bartender nodded. He knew Tom. He knew Harry. Men like these often had their little jokes.

Tom rushed out. And even in his anxiety, he grinned at the thought of how he'd nicked old Harry for that tab. He walked quickly, then ran. Had he done it again? He had always been one for the big gesture. What had he given that girl in his drunken ardor? Had he pretended to be a man of wealth, of endless time? Without remembering, he knew now that he had done that, because he always pretended with strangers, especially with pretty females. What in the passionate moment, exchanging hot breath, those emerald eyes blazing into his, those soft legs.

What had he given her? It came back to him, verbatim, like the sound of a great gong. One month. Not one day. Not one week. One entire month of his precious hoard of time. Oh, my God, one months.

He ran faster. The motel was near. He would find her. He would get it back. Get most of it. 29 days, at the very least. Or wring that soft neck until the emerald eyes bugged out. Such was the enormity of that drunken deed, the incredible stupidity of risking his survival for the satisfaction of that pretense and lust, that he had blocked it all out. Now it was unblocked. Now it came back with all the bitterness that such a foolish act can engender. Yes, for a certainty.

That was it. He could even hear his own voice in that passion-tossed bed, as he pressed her little hand in his hot palm . . . as the tingling contact was made, as his whole body tingled with it, from head to toe. „Deb . . . one month, sweetheart. One month, angel . . . Deb deb deb. He stopped short, shaking with the memory. One month? That cheap, filthy bag . . . 2 hr would have been plenty.

He raced on. The motel was just around the corner. He still had time. Time! With the creation of the Timebank, the prudent merchants who ruled this land achieved their final solution to the work ethic, as well as to the credit system and the population boom. Work for time. Time is life. Life is time. The most valuable element in the universe became the sole currency of exchange. It had always been the most valuable element in the universe; but never before had its value been so fittingly recognized, so suitably used.

The element is time. Time measured in years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, seconds. The living time of man. Into the body of each adult at the start of the system, and thereafter into the body of each newborn infant, ingenious microdevices were implanted. These tiny mechanisms transmitted and received. The bearer was kept in constant touch with the Timebank. Every person in this land had a Time account with an individual meter.

From the moment of implantation at birth, the meter began to tick off the seconds of life. This accounting persisted without interference until the individual reached majority, at which precise moment, said individual received a year's bonus of free time. After 12 months, exactly - the Timebank was always exact to the millisecond - the individual was on his own in the battle for time.

All wages and prices were based on time units. The work week (wk wk) was 37.7 hrs--an odd amount reached by compromise and slide rule. Wages varied, depending on the nature of the job. The established monthly rent for a standard one-bedroom apartment was 48.3 hr (52.6 air with air conditioning). You might buy a small piano for three months' debit (3 mo deb) or sell it for 3 mo cred, etc.

There were millionaires who had amassed decades of time, all on deposit in the Timebank. There were a few billionaires who owned centuries of time and, by willing them to lucky heirs, created dynasties. The Timebank was not created without a struggle. But the prudent merchants who ruled this land had their way. Who could deny that time was man's most valuable and irreplaceable possession?



Tom reached the motel breathless, exhausted. What was her name? Had he ever known? But he could describe her. Not many looked like that. They would have a record, a forwarding address. Then, as he reached the glass-enclosed bar - eureka! - there she was. Scarlet and emerald. Seated on a bar stool, just as she had been when he first saw her.

She was seated with a large man. Both were laughing. „I must talk to you.“ Damn, what was her name? She looked at him startled. Did she recognize him?

The big man frowned. „I beg your pardon,“ she said.

„You remember me, Tom,“ he said anxiously.

„You must be mistaken,“ she said politely. „I don't know you.“

„Don't know me? I'm Tom. I gave you a month,“ he shouted.

The bartender and several customers turned at that.

A month? „Really,“ she said, „you must be drunk. „ „Go away.“ said the big man.

„Please. Juliet,“ he said, her name coming back in a miraculous flash.

„You must remember. I made a mistake. I gave you too much. I need some. Give It back. Please.“

„My name is not Juliet. I never saw you before,“ she said, her eyes cold now.

He grasped her bare arm and held it tightly.

„Juliet, Juliet, you are my last hope. I'm running out of time. Out of time.“

Everybody in the bar shuddered.

„Get this bum away from me,“ she shrieked.

The big man leaped from his stool and grabbed Tom by the neck, pulling him away. Tom clung to her arm. She came off the stool onto the floor, screaming. The big man and the bartender pulled Tom from the girl and threw him into the street. He staggered to his feet. The menacing figures were inside the glass door. shouting obscenities. He moved unsteadily down the street, then leaned against a lightpost.

He pressed his right ear lobe. Once, twice, three, four times. Calling the chief accountant. He had never done this before. It cost ten whole minutes, but he had to know the truth. Exactly.

He waited, longer than usual. Then a soft sound that was new - a bell tolling one, two, three times. Then a deep voice, also new. „Chief-accountant report, re account T-798324-X7 3 minutes, 15 seconds.“ Then the tolling of the bell, once.

Silence. 3 min ! 5 sec! He looked about wildly.

A man was coming toward him, a man with hat, topcoat and briefcase. Tom rushed to him, his hand held out like a beggar's.

„Please give me - lend me a little time 10 min. I'm running out.“

A terrible phrase. The man paled, averted his eyes and walked on.

A woman wearing a fur jacket approached from the other direction. Tom ran to her, his hand held out, pleading for a tingly touch.

„Please, 10 min, I'm running out.“

The woman gasped, turned and walked rapidly away.

A man roughly dressed in blue denims and working shoes crossed the street near him.

„Sir.“ cried Tom, rushing to him.

„I'm running out. Please lend me a little - anything.“

The man scowled, muttered and started off. Tom grabbed his sleeve.

„You've got to help me. I'm running out. Can you hear me? Running out.“

The lady with the fur jacket and the man with the briefcase had stopped a short distance away and were watching Tom turned to them, shouting so they could hear.

„Somebody . . . anybody . . . five minutes. four minute. . .“

A young couple approached, a girl with long blonde hair and a young man with a guitar hung over his shoulder. Tom took them in a frantic glance. He knew the type - newly arrived at their majority,

rich with time.

„Please,“ he said, moving toward them, his hand outstretched. The girl looked alarmed.

„What is it?“ said the young man.

„Time - I'm running out. Please help me,“ said Tom.

The couple looked at each other.

„Is he kidding?“ said the man in working clothes. „Look at that silk shirt, that suit, those shoes. Worth weeks. That briefcase. If you're so broke, pawn it.“

„I didn't think of that.“ said Tom, staring at his expensive briefcase.

„A professional beggar,“ said the lady.

„Probably has a Rolls and a chauffeur around the corner,“ said the well-dressed man.

„I'm not a beggar. I've never begged in my life,“ cried Tom.

The young girl was staring at him. Her young man took her arm impatiently.

„Come on,“ he said.

„Wait, Lou,“ she said. „He needs help.“

The young voice was like a beam of pure light in Tom's gathering darkness. He moved toward her, desperately turning on the charm that had wooed and won a score of such girls.

„Believe me, trust me . . . I'll pay you back double, triple. But I need it now. . now, darling . . .“

The young man frowned at that and again grasped his girl's arm.

„Come on, he's a phony.“

„He is, dear. Don't be taken in,“ said the woman with the fur.

„He's a pro,“ said the man in working clothes. „Look at that coat . that shirt . . those shoes,“

Tom tore off his coat, then his shirt, ripping the buttons. He pulled off a shoe and, with the briefcase, tossed the bundle onto the street near the man. „Take them. Take everything. I have. for one minute . for one lousy minute,“ he howled.

The girl gasped, pulled away from her escort and moved toward Tom.

„I believe you, I believe your,“ she said, extending her hand toward him.

„I lend you . . . I give you one week,“ she said defiantly, with the generosity of youth to whom time is endless.

For one precious second, Tom stared at the young stranger who had appeared out of nowhere like a shining angel. One week! Time to do anything. Time to live. He reached his hand toward hers, to feel the tingle that meant salvation. But the contact was not made. The transaction was not completed.

In the Timebank, as the endless rows and tiers, row upon row, tier upon tier, clicked and hummed quietly, on a certain tier, in a certain row, there was a louder click, more of a clack. A circuit breaker closed an account. Tom's account. A tiny device, no bigger than a flyspeck, exploded in Tom's left ventricle.

He collapsed in the street and was still. The young girl screamed. The others looked at one another, then at Tom. A crowd gathered. An officer broke through and knelt by the fallen man. „Officer what is it?“ asked a lady.

„Overdrawn,“ said the officer.

All sighed and lowered their heads. The men removed their hats.

*Oracle*

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