

A Short Story: Time Out [B2]

Un breve racconto sullo scorrere inesorabile del tempo. Per vivere più tranquilli, forse sarebbe meglio non guardare troppo l'orologio!

Melissa sat staring at the **pocket watch**, watching the smallest hand **tick off** the seconds of her life. "What are you doing?" asked her sister, Kathy, in an exasperated tone. "Nothing," said Melissa. She was **purposefully** doing nothing in the hope that it would slow down time, the limited time she had, the limited time all humans had. Time had become an obsession ever since her father had died and left her his old **pocket watch**. It wasn't the first time Melissa had become fixated on an abstract concept. The last time this had happened, she had been twelve and just gone through a **growth spurt**. She had become fixated on the size of things then, thinking of herself and everything around her at one moment as enormous and the next moment as microscopic. She'd felt like Alice in Wonderland, growing and then **shrinking**, except that in her imagination, everything around her was also shifting in size. "I'm just trying to understand what size things really are," she had explained to Kathy at the time. "I mean what size we would appear to someone from another planet. Like, we think everything is a normal size, the size it's meant to be, but it's all relative, you know." Kathy hadn't known, and had been **relieved** when her big sister had **grown out of** her fixation. But then this had happened. "I think I'm having a mid-life crisis," Melissa said now. Kathy laughed. "I think you're a bit too young for a mid-life crisis. You're thirty-one." "Exactly the right time for one," said Melissa, dropping the **pocket watch** and getting her phone to show Kathy an article she'd been reading. "See! The median age of the world's population is thirty-one. I'm exactly mid-way between the youngest and oldest person on the planet." "Give me that," said Kathy. "Okay, so you're right, but that's because some parts of the world have inferior **sanitation** and healthcare. You live in England, where the **life expectancy** for women is..." Kathy looked up the **figure** on Google. "Eighty-three!" she said triumphantly. "And it will be even higher by the time we are old women. So you are probably no more than a third of the way through your life. You have plenty of time." "But what do I do with all this time?" asked Melissa, **distressed**. "If I do nothing, it will

slow down and I'll have more time to do nothing. If I do lots of things, it will speed up and I'll run out of time before I know it. Just like Dad did." She started to cry now, in grief and frustration. "Oh, Melissa, Dad lived a full life. He was happy." "Was he really? His life was so routine, tedious, repetitive. He was trapped by time, just like most people are. Get up at seven, start work at nine, eat lunch at noon, leave work at five, go to bed at eleven, get up the next day and do the same thing all over again." "Oh, come on, it wasn't always like that. We had fun times too. We had days out at the weekend, holidays in Spain..." "Sure, we did. We all do. We do the routine things, always waiting for the time to pass, hoping it will go faster, so we can do the fun things. People live for the weekend, get through the week for two days of freedom. But then it's Sunday night again before they know it, and they feel depressed at the thought of Monday." It felt good to finally be voicing all the thoughts that had been tormenting her for weeks. She continued, "We complain that we don't have enough time to do all the things we want to do, or that we have too much time on our hands. We do things to kill time. Killing time, it's like killing ourselves!" "So don't kill time," said Kathy. "Use the time you have to enjoy life." "But like I said, if I enjoy life too much, it will fly by. Time flies when you're having fun. That's why I'm sitting here, doing nothing, so that time passes more slowly." She picked up the pocket watch again to stare at it. "You can't actually slow down time," said Kathy, taking the pocket watch from her. "You can't control time. None of us can. All we can control is what we do with the time we have." She took a brochure from her bag. "So, let's do something timeless, literally timeless. I saw this at the yoga studio and thought of you." The brochure was for a retreat called Time Out. "I've been to retreats before," said Melissa, reluctantly accepting the brochure. "They're not exactly life-changing." "This one is different. It has no routine, no attachment to time. Your internal body clock decides when you do what, when you get up, when you eat, when you sleep..." "I don't know," said Melissa. "Liberate yourself from the conventions of time," said Kathy, citing the brochure. "It sounds like something we all need. Come on, let's do it together." "Well, okay then. But do you really think it will help?" "I don't know. I hope so. Only time will tell."

Glossary

- **growth spurt** = crescita improvvisa, scatto di crescita
- **figure** = cifra
- **attachment** = attaccamento, legame
- **pocket watch** = orologio da taschino
- **life expectancy** = aspettativa di vita
- **run out** = terminare
- **tick off** = spuntare, detrarre
- **voicing** = dare voce, esprimere
- **retreat** = ritiro
- **in grief** = dal dolore
- **brochure** = opuscolo
- **purposefully** = intenzionalmente
- **shrinking** = restringere
- **relieved** = alleviare
- **grown out of** = smettere, abbandonare qualcosa crescendo
- **sanitation** = igiene
- **distressed** = angustiata, tormentata
- **timeless** = senza tempo, atemporale
- **reluctantly** = svogliatamente