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The Prince and Time

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Long after long-ago but shortly before one-upon-a-time, there was a prince."

Cover Page Footnote

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The Prince and Time

By JAMES R. HALL, JR.

Long after long-ago but shortly before one-upon-a-time, there was a prince.

—So very much there is to do. So very much there is to do, he would say. And when night comes, it comes very quickly. I shall find time to do that which I wish.

Thus in search of time he set off. That he might catch time. That he might have enough.

The peasant asked:

—My Prince, it is true that I must get in the harvest. I — a poor peasant—am not able to give time. No time have I.

The smith of the village asked:

—My Prince, I have no time but my own. Though I deeply wish that I might, I am not able to give time unto you.

The prince asked everyone in the village. No extra time had they. The prince asked everyone in the kingdom. No extra time. For to have extra time all were too busy.

Now to ask everyone in a kingdom (such as then they were) demands from one a large deal of time. Once young, the prince felt old age absorbing him. I-shall-find-time hardened into I-must, for old age was absorbing him. To countries around this world went the old prince (still a prince was he, for his father was too busy to die).

—No, but tell us if you find the secret, said bosy heads-of-state.

No. No. Time was not to be had from others. How dejected did the prince go back to his kingdom. How. He walked the streets of his village. Up he looked and down.

—That I might catch time, he said. That I might have enough.

An old woman, broken and bent, approached.

—My Prince, said she, I have heard that one may have all the time that one wishes, if one would catch Father Time.

—Where, O Woman, may I find this Father?

—He lives, O my Prince, atop a mountain, they say, a mountain high, ragged, and jagged. A mountain hard to climb. There lives he, this Father Time.

She pointed to a purple peak in the west.

—It is a chance, said the old prince. It is a chance.

He climbed the mountain. Up, up to the purple peak. There he found Father Time. (Who looked no older than the prince.)

—I would have time, the old prince said. A lifetime I have searched for time. I have forgone white chargers, moats, and fair damsels in distress. I have forgone all things princely. Even the Holy Grail. All of my life I have said: Would that I would have more time. Now I would have time. Now.

—My Son, said Father Time. Time — time is made, not given.

—Still . . . , persisted the old prince.

—As you would have it, my Son. Receive this jar. After I leave, open it; for there is all the time you would have.

The old prince — how his hands did tremble — tried to get the cap from the jar. He strained his aged heart. And the jar fell empty from his lifeless hand.

