

## Time in my Hands

I walk out of my back door, through the yard, and keep walking as I so often do. I walk along the main road, cars and trucks pass me as my steps further cement the path I have created among the dry dirt and dust that cover just about everything the grass does not touch.

The sun beats down on my back, not a cloud in the sky to rescue me from the heat. My feet take me past the town hall, past the dairy farm, past the houses on the edge of town. Before I know it, I am shaded by the tall and full trees of the forest that grow right outside of the town limits.

The forest is cool, protecting me completely from the harsh sun. The dark and damp atmosphere is calm, and it puts me at ease. I keep walking, past the wild flowers, past the berry patch, make a left at the tree with the incredibly low hanging branches.

I soon arrive at my spot, the big stone underneath the single apple tree in the forest. I was drawn to this place the first time I entered the forest, the apple tree's loneliness called out to me as it is the only one of its kind. It had gone to the trouble of providing a rock underneath so someone could sit with it and keep it company, which is what I have been doing since we met.

My friend is already waiting for me. He started coming to the tree after I did. My first encounter with him was upon my second meeting with the tree. We have great fun, the three of us. Long conversations where we talk about the woes of the world and how we can turn it around. Well, my friend does most of the talking, the tree and I just listen. But as he includes us in his ideas, we have all become visionaries, the hope of the next world.

My friend seems troubled today. He is sitting on the rock that I usually occupy as he paces around and shares his ideas. He seems folded into himself, as if trying to condense himself into a ball, and I can hear his muttering from several yards away.

“Beelzebub,” I call out, “what has got you so distressed today?”

My friend rises from his slumped position to his full height, several times taller than my own. He stretches out his leathery wings to their full expanse and his red eyes are filled with worry.

“We’re running out of time, we’re running out of time,” he continues to repeat the phrase as I get closer.

He moves towards me suddenly, unfurling his fist and revealing an hourglass, shoving it from his grip and into my chest. I take the item and observe it. The sand is moving from the top to the bottom, but the amount of sand in each end stays the same. My friend will occasionally bring me treasures; pendants that he says will keep me out of harm’s way, a handbook written in a dead language with instructions on how to stay in good health, candles and salts that I can use to call him if I really need to since he doesn’t have a phone. But this gift is different, I can feel the enchantment on it.

“Beelzebub, what is this?” For a small trinket, there is so much weight to it. It is as if the sands of time are turning in my hands.

“My friend, we are running out of time!” He exclaims as he points a talon at our apple tree. Upon closer inspection our tree seems to be wilting. This is odd, even in the off season our tree continues to produce apples. It is always in full bloom. But today the apples are not as red, there

are brown and cracked leaves on the ground beneath it, and the branches are closer to the ground. They seem sad as they reach out to touch the earth that we all share.

“I must go,” my friend says, “do not call me. I will speak to you when I see you next.” And with that, he turns away and walks further into the forest, vanishing before my eyes.

I walk up to our tree, I stroke its trunk with care, I shine the apples that hang low enough for me to reach. I take off one of the pendants that Beelzebub had gifted to me and hang it on the tree’s branch.

I whisper a “get well soon” into the wind and set off to return home.

As I reach home, I close and lock the door behind me. I sit at my kitchen table and inspect the hour glass. The sand has still not moved from one side to the other, the falling stream seeming infinite. I spend most of my time inspecting it until I return to the forest next.

Beelzebub is not here. I talk to the tree for a while. Its condition has not worsened, but it is not improving.

I return the next day and Beelzebub is still not here. The tree’s condition is the same. The only thing changing is me. I am lonely, I am angry, I am confused.

“Just what mess has he gotten himself into? And why has he dragged us along into it?” I cry out to the tree. Nothing is the same without our friend here, who brings the best company any person or tree could hope for. “When will he come back?” I ask. The unspoken question hangs heavy in the silence between the tree and I, *will he come back?*

On the third day, I decide not to go back. I am sure Beelzebub is not there. I debate calling him, even though he told me not to. I decided to try something else.

I yell at the hourglass, “it’s your fault, isn’t it? Why are you keeping our friend from us? What do you want from me?”

In a fit of anger, I knock over the hourglass and the sand still stays the same. Equal amounts in the top and the bottom. I place it on the table upright. A pang of urgency comes over me, and I am controlled by a deep force within me to turn the hourglass over.

All at once, the sand runs out. From the top, to the bottom of the glass.

And everything goes dark.

I come to in an open field, surrounded by a vibrant green and the other colors of the natural earth. The only thing that man has touched is the ground beneath my feet.

I look off into the distance, and a few yards from me is the apple tree. But that is impossible!  
How could nothing of my world remain except for my friend?

As I approach it, I can clearly recognize my friend, its branches looking as strong as usual, its leaves being all green and intact, and its apples as red and shiny as ever. I can even see the pendant that I had hung on its branch just a few days before.

And the rock underneath the tree is waiting for me to take my seat.

I hear a loud noise, a sort of whistling, as I look up into the sky and see a mass engulfed in flames hurtling towards the earth. Like a comet it shoots out across the sky, falling from the heavens, and touches down a few miles away from me. The collision shakes the earth and I fall over. I get up and run towards it, an urgency moving my feet in a way they never have before. I reach the crater in the earth and I recognize the now extinguished mass as my friend.

“Beelzebub!” I call out to him, as I rush down the crater towards him and collect him in my arms.

He looks up at me and smiles, “we have more time.”