

Mr. Fizborne's Meeting with Time

Time was something Fizborne never had time for. There was just too much to do. He was the head of Employee Services and Relations in World, Inc., and that meant he was second in command. There was hardly even a minute for meetings with Time, important as the CEO was. Keeping track of the Seasons family was a killer. The whole lot of them would show up wherever they wanted whenever they wanted, causing all sorts of meteorological chaos. And Hope was always hanging around, trying to get a word in with Fizborne. He did what he could to lose her. She was just so desperate, so dramatic, so in-denial from avoiding Truth. She kept conveniently missing her department interviews with Truth, which made her an undependable employee, and yet he never failed to reschedule. He was persistent like that, but Lies kept him so distracted that he was blinded as to Hope's real character. If there was a problem, he was so sure he could fix it. After all, Truth was a little full of himself. So while Fizborne was busy righting Seasons, losing Hope, breaking up Truth and Lies, and generally trying to keep the company in order, Time simply waited.

Like he did every morning, Time came to Fizborne's secretary, Heaven, looking like he hadn't slept for millennia. He dressed in a gray suit that blended in with the office decor so well that Hope sat on him at 10:02. She was frantically seeking entrance to Fizborne's box of an office and hadn't noticed him being too still on the gray chair on the seventh floor. No one really ever noticed him passing either, though when he stood, he towered over everyone. While everyone knew he couldn't be younger than 25 or older than 45, no one could agree on an age that fit him. It was a topic of much discussion in the entry-level jobs.

This Tuesday, Fizborne had had quite a hectic morning. Truth and Lies were at each

others' throats, Winter had snuck off to Jamaica and created a blizzard, and Hope had already left 37 messages on his cell phone, stuffing his voicemail box so full no one outside of work could reach him. At 12:32 he decided it was time for a break.

He pressed the speed dial for Heaven, as well as the round speakerphone button.

"Yes, Mr. Fizborne?" Her drab voice imitated the office decor.

"Is there anyone to see me before I take lunch?"

"Yes, Mr. Fizborne." There was a low buzzing on the line.

"Well, who is it?"

"It's Time."

Fizborne slumped in his high-backed chair. He rubbed an eyebrow with the heel of his hand, then grabbed the receiver with the other hand and brought it to his lips. "Alright. Send him in, although you know I don't have time for this."

As he set the receiver down, Time rapped his knuckles on the door and walked in.

"Come in, come in," Fizborne breathed, resting his elbows on the desk. "Have a seat."

Time folded himself up in the tiny straight-backed chair and threaded his long, spiny fingers together. "So." His voice was gritty and slow, like he had all the time in the world.

"So."

"I've been trying to meet with you for some time, Mr. Fizborne."

Fizborne shifted up in his high-backed chair. "Well, everyone knows I've got a lot of things to keep track of."

"You've been avoiding me."

Fizborne looked out his small, square window. The red brick building next door filled the

view only three feet away. He loved looking at those bricks. He studied them often. Mostly when someone sat across from him reminding him about silly things he didn't like to deal with. Each brick had deep, vertical grooves. He had imagined thousands of ways to fill up those grooves.

“Fizborne?” Anyone else would have been impatient. Time was never impatient.

He slid his eyes back to the tall man in his gray suit. “Well, Time, I know I've had to put off our meeting for a few weeks, but you know how this job goes. As CEO I'm sure it's much worse for you. The job just doesn't make time for much change.”

“No, but you're making it worse, not keeping to a regular schedule with me. In fact, you're quite a bit off now.”

“So what can I expect this time? I figure it's about time for my hair to start graying. About time it matched the office, eh?” Fizborne chuckled.

Time leaned forward over his unending legs. His gray eyes were a bit cloudy, they always were, like he'd discovered how to keep his soul from showing out of them. Fizborne didn't like all the things that Time managed to keep hidden behind those clouds.

“Fizborne, your time is up.”

“Up?”

“Up,” Time repeated. Those cloudy eyes crinkled for a moment, making Time appear older than Fizborne had ever imagined. Then the cloudiness that was always there began to dissipate.

“*Up?*” Fizborne curled his lips tightly, trying to do the math in his head. “But I couldn't have been more than a month or two late--”

“Three-hundred-and-twenty-two years late, actually,” Time said. “It's astounding, I know.

I did quite the same thing when I held your position.”

Fizborne felt himself growing older. And the older he grew, the clearer Time’s eyes became. It took him much longer than usual to comprehend Time’s statement. He reached for the telephone receiver to check the data with Heaven, but his fingers wouldn’t open and they clumsily knocked the receiver to his desk. Even as he tried to keep his memories, he lost Truth and Lies’ argument from that morning, he lost the Seasons’ quarrel from last weekend, he lost Hope for the last time. He seemed unable to move faster than a giant tortoise on the beach. Time’s eyes continued to clear, and Fizborne began to see what they’d been hiding. He wished the cloudiness would return.

“We all get promoted sometime,” Time said, “now it’s your turn, and I’m ready to retire.” Without hope of escape, Fizborne donned Time’s gray suit jacket. It was too big, but he would grow into it. As soon as he passed the mantle, Time simply became another Memory.