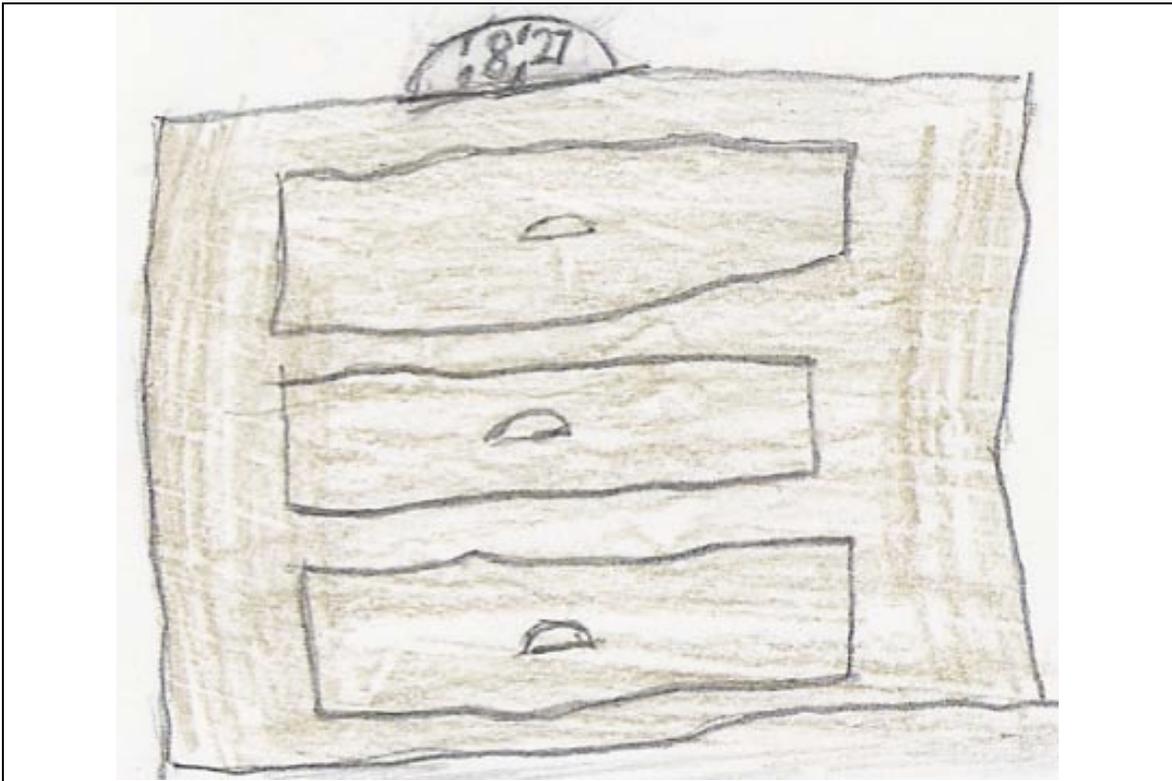


The Little TIME Thief



By Stuart Baum

Bureau illustration by Camilla Baum

For Camilla,
my little time thief.

It happened just how you would pluck a shiny berry from a bush as you walked by.

Allina was in school, walking through the hallway on her way to the bathroom. Down the empty hall, Gerry was sitting on a bench outside of the principal's office, yet again, loudly tapping his foot on the ground. He had been bad, Allina knew, and had been given a 'time-out.' Probably for talking in class or for teasing one of the girls. He did both of those. A lot. The punishment was fifteen minutes on the bench in the hallway, in full view of the Parent Monitor.

"Hi, *Tizzy*," Gerry teased as he saw her walking toward him. The nickname was a short story (but not this one) and Allina hated it.

She ignored Gerry and, holding her hallway pass up for the Parent Monitor to see, she continued on her way to the bathroom.

Then it happened.

Gerry, to himself, but loudly enough for Allina to hear, said, "I wish the fifteen minutes would just disappear."

And just how you would pluck a shiny berry from a bush as you walked by, she grabbed the fifteen minutes from Gerry.

Gerry must have somehow felt the time pass, since he quickly looked up at the clock on the wall. His eyes brightened. The fifteen minutes had gone by, just like that! He leapt from the bench and returned to the classroom.

Now it was nearly bedtime.

Allina was coloring a picture on the kitchen table while her father cleaned the stove.

“Okay, sweetie,” he said, “go upstairs, brush your teeth and get ready for stories. I will be up in five minutes.”

Though she really wanted to finish coloring her picture, she put her crayons back in the box, folded a corner in the coloring book to keep her place, and carried the book and crayon box upstairs.

She put on her pajamas, brushed her teeth, and washed her face. Then she looked at the clock on her bureau. **8:27**. Story time was **8:30**.

She took out Gerry’s fifteen minutes and unfolded it, just how you would unfold a full sheet of paper that had been carefully folded to the size of a postage stamp. Except that there was no paper.

The time was now **8:28**.

Allina sat down on her rug and opened up her coloring book. She took out her crayons and began coloring.

Every few minutes she would glance up at the clock to see the time. It remained **8:28**.

She finished coloring the picture and was proud of the job. In a few places she had gone outside of the lines, but only where she had planned. She put the book and the crayons in the drawer under her bed.

Allina heard her father's footsteps coming up the stairs. It was now **8:29**.

Her father came in the room and smiled to see Allina sitting up in bed, her back to the wall, green and yellow patched quilt pulled up to her chin, waiting for him to read her a story. He looked at the clock. It was exactly **8:30**. He nodded.

"No book?" he asked with a grin. "Are we making up a story tonight?"

"Yes," she said.

"About what?" he asked.

"About a little girl named Allina-"

"Of course," interjected her father.

"-who can steal time," she finished.

He gave her a curious look. Then he sat on her bed and leaned against the wall.

Her father pretended to grab something small from the air. He opened his hand to reveal that there was nothing inside it.

"Just how you would pluck a shiny berry from a bush as you walked by..."

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