

A Moment Frozen in Time

Wind whistles across the window and howls at the front door. As the conversation begins to dim at the dinner table, the comforting sound of the crackling fire in the next room beckons everyone to come near. One by one, family members leave the meal behind and accept the invitation of the leaping flames by pulling together plush arm chairs, making a circle around their beloved grandfather.

Stillness sweeps across the room as eager, admiring faces gaze upon the old man. His rich voice soars over the blustering wind and the flickering blaze as he begins to pull a tale from the depths of his memory. As with all other anecdotes he tells, the grandfather begins by reminding the children that, through stories, one will never be forgotten. After the simple disclaimer, he closes his eyes, takes a soothing breath, and settles his mind before beginning to weave the tale of his glory days during the war.

As his eyes open, they glance toward the far corner of the room, where an old golden pocket watch, with the time frozen at 8:30 am, gleams in the fire's light. Yet, this Waltham is not simply a watch. It is a reminder of the moments he experienced and the people he met in his earlier life.

The grandfather asks his youngest grandchild to retrieve the watch for him from its glass case. Stroking it carefully with his hand, he tells of the time it was with him that dreary day on the battlefield. Entering into the moment with a sudden burst of rage, his voice hoarsens as he shouts, "Duck and cover!" loud enough to raise the hairs on his frightened audience's arms. To them, the phrase is simply part of a story, yet the grandfather has entered into a stage of previous reality, as if in a dream. The old man sees himself running into the far away distance, attempting to dodge the bullets as they whizz by in the early morning light. Left, then right, then left again.

Faster and faster until he plummets to the ground, desperately clutching his hands over his hard-shelled helmet in an attempt to save himself from the fate that so many around him have already succumbed to. As the soldiers beside him moan in agony, he hears the man next to him, no older than nineteen, beg to know the time. The grandfather sees himself reach inside the pocket of his musty green uniform for his watch. After a quick glance, the man covers his head once again and replies “zero eight thirty” before slithering to the other side of the trampled field. The old man suddenly stomps his feet on the wooden floors of the room one at a time, mimicking the giant shout bellowed by the curious young man as a blast, brighter than the roaring fire and louder than the howl of the wind, catapulted him into a sea of chaos.

As the final words trickle from his tongue, the grandfather reenters his present reality, wipes a tear from his eye, and stares at the mesmerized faces in front of him. He shivers, not from the weather outside the house, but from the fright of the nightmare he has just retold. Still gripping the watch in his wrinkled hands, he stares down at its face once more and silently whispers “zero eight thirty” to himself, forever remembering the man who died beside him and the frightful moment frozen in time.