

Time Is Money

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I'm drinking apple brandy from a plastic water bottle at a table in Munich International Airport. The clock, above me, reads 10 a.m., and I can feel my eyes water with each slug, each draw I take off, what used to be, a 'Caledonian Springs' sparkling water bottle.

Through the tinted plastic, the brandy looks blue, sloshing around behind a label bearing what I can only assume are the Caledonian foothills, a clean, fresh Caledonian stream running down the bottle, and into a pure, cool glacial lake. I always thought apple brandy would taste sweeter, easier somehow, but it fits me better this way, tearing at my throat as it goes down, and I laugh through the tears the awful stuff pushes into my eyes, through the prickly feeling in my nose, and let it warm my stomach.

There's a Spanish family eating breakfast at the table next to mine; this isn't my finest hour, but then, that's not really my fault.

Because it's 10 a.m., and I've already had a long day.

Because I had an early flight.

When I woke up this morning, my travel alarm clock was throbbing in time with a spot two inches deep, inside my temples. I hit the indiglow snooze button, and the clock flashed "6:30 a.m." Perfect.

Lufthansa flight 6993 to London Heathrow was due to leave at 9:10. I had time for a shower.

That's how, clean and gelled, with a fresh cup of coffee and a butter-filled pretzel, I stood at the platform of the Hauptbahnhof (main train station) waiting for the S1 or S8 train to ferry me to the airport.

The S8 is quicker, so I let an S1 pass, and then another. I glanced at my watch. 7:23. I had plenty of time.

The next S8 was due at 8:38. Trains pulled in and out, and the Germans I'd been standing with left, and were replaced with new ones from the escalator. I waited for my coffee to cool, started to eat one of the pretzels, and stuffed the other one in my bag to save for the plane.

I checked my watch. 7:32. Great. The train was due in just six minutes, and I rooted around in my bag to grab my book.

7:34. Another S6 rolled past the platform. Wouldn't be long now. The S8 was working its way up the flip-style train schedule by the

clock. Not long now, and I checked the clock that hung down from the ceiling. 8:35.

Quick check of the watch: 7:35. Perfect. I glanced up again at the clock. 8:35.

Holy crap.

Germans are never wrong; their train system is impeccable.

I once got a German train conductor's watch for my birthday, which my mother and I were certain was broken, perpetually slow, until we sent it back, and a clipped German accent phoned to say that the watch was not broken, that Deutsche Bahn watches did not break. The watch was designed to set itself *automatically via satellite* to perfekt German time. In fact, she said, the company was thrilled that it had continued to connect with satellites over American airspace; a possibility they hadn't envisioned. My watch had the correct time, it was me that was on the wrong continent.

Daylight savings time comes early in Europe, two to three weeks earlier than in the U.S., and it had just cost me an hour.

If I were writing this scene for the stage, I would insert a beat here.

I ran up the escalator, and out into the street. I had a ticket for the train, but my flight left in 40 minutes, and I needed a cab. And I spilled my coffee. All over my hand.

The driver clucked his tongue as I rushed through my information, and we sped away through the city "zum Flughafen" while he shook his head and drove.

I divided my time monitoring a state of the art GPS map on the console that showed our car barreling down the autobahn, speeding through off-ramps and causeways and toward the "departures" dropoff, and the LCD digital meter, that climbed in increments of .30 Euro like an alarm clock broken of bonds of time. As it climbed, I mentally counted the bills in my pocket.

I'd had fifty euro before breakfast; I guessed I had about 45 now.

We sped on, and the meter climbed, and the clock ticked. The GPS brains behind the cabbie's operations estimated that we'd arrive at 8:52 a.m. The meter, the metaphorical brawn, sped on, to 30, 30.60, 34. As it hit 38.10, I remembered a few coins in my pockets. I guessed I could cover as much as 48, maybe 49 Euros.

We hit the offramp to the airport, and the meter broke fifty. There's a kind of helpless apathy that overtakes you when you know you're

WHERE THE HELL IS WAYNE, MAINE?



about to be handed a bill you can't pay. It's almost serene.

We pulled up to the curb, and the driver looked at his watch, and looked at the meter, and started wishing me good luck with the flight. I flipped through my cash, pretended to count it, pretended to be surprised when I came up short.

In a crazy relay race, I left my bag in the backseat, and booked it inside, the loose contents of my wallet scattering on the marble floor in front of the ATM, and I scooped credit cards and ID and crumpled bills into my cupped hands as I seized 100 Euros from the machine, hobbling with my tattered effects back the cab, and tossing sixty Euros at the driver, squeezing my bag from the seat, and then sprinting through early morning passengers to the ticket counter, small coins and old receipts ping-pong and fluttering behind me like jetsam.

The first class attendant sat idle while a bald man with skis and a middle aged Austrian couple occupied the other two counter-women. I actually tapped my foot with impatience, turning my head first to the cue ball skier, then frantically to the Wieners, up at the clock, and then back again to Baldie McSkiSki, my sneakers slapping against the floor like Sonic the Hedgehog with a passport.

I'd come so far. This could not be happening. I wanted to scream, a globe-trotting John McEnroe: look at this watch, look at this time, the mark is there, you c-a-n-n-o-t be serious!

Because I'd done everything right, left plenty of time, set two alarms. And Europe had screwed me. And even so, I'd ponied up mountains of dough for a cab, overcome seeming

debt, criss-crossed this airport's patterned marble floors.

I silently had a tantrum there, at 8:55 a.m., what should have been 7:55, standing alone in long maze of empty line, waiting and watching as my flight prepared for takeoff, as the bald man adjusted his skis, and the couple read over some product literature. Absolutely powerless in every sense. And then it passed.

Beaten and bashed into submission by reality and misfortune, I had no reaction as the Lufthansa counter-woman told me, in German, that I was far too late for boarding, had, in fact, been too late when I got into a cab outside the Hauptbahnhof, too late from the moment I woke up, assumedly on schedule, an hour earlier.

This why, almost unthinking, removed from fiscal reality, I politely handed over my credit card for a 75 euro excess, quietly signed the form, and thanked her as she handed me a new boarding pass and a four hour wait.

And this is why, beaten like an old man, I waited for the respectable hour of 10 a.m. to buy a half-liter jug of apple brandy at the Duty Free shop across the corridor, why I poured the last half a bottle of Caledonian spring water into a public toilet in a stall in the men's room, and redistributed the brandy to this more socially polite container.

Europe has made a habit of punishing my youth and inexperience, and so now, with four hours and an empty stomach, I will fight back with a role that fate can't refuse: as an old man, cursing the world, and covering his mouth. Self righteous and justified to a fault; desperately afraid, that someone might check his breath.