

Excuse me, Carl.

Two men stand in a nowhere — no walls, no clock, no hour to keep. Both are named Carl. One spent his life measuring the universe; the other, the soul. One of them asks the time.

Excuse me, Carl. Do you have the time?

No one *has* the time. We borrow it from a star eight minutes away. You're asking me for something that left the sun before you finished the question.

I didn't ask where it's *been*. I asked if you have it. Now.

Now is a rumor. By the time my voice reaches you, it's already memory. We only ever speak to each other's pasts.

Then we're well matched — I've spent my life listening to people's pasts. But the *now* isn't so empty. A man waiting for news weighs each second like lead. A man in love can't find the clock at all. The soul keeps a different calendar than the sun.

...And yet you asked *me*. The man with the wristwatch.

I did.

Then the honest thing is to look. It says 12:12. Though I should warn you — the hand already moved while I read it. I've handed you a snapshot of a river and called it the river.

I never wanted the number.

Then *why ask?*

Because we're both named Carl, we met in a nowhere with no clock between us, and the question simply rose in me — the way a dream does. *That* was the experiment.

So you didn't want the time.

I wanted the *moment*.

And I gave you a number that was already wrong.

And I gave you a question that was never quite a question.

...So. Do you, or do you not, now have the time?

What time did you say it was?

It *was* 12:12.

Was. You see? Already gone.