

# A Question of Time by Carmen Firan

Contributed by Carmen Firan

A QUESTION OF TIME Â by Carmen Firan Â Bob â€“ an American businessman in Rome Alfredo â€“ a middle age Italian met in the street Richard â€“ American, Bob's partner Gina â€“ a young Italian woman passing by Â Rome, Italy. Middle of the day. Bob is rushing to a meeting. He realizes he forgot his watch in the hotel room. He stops a man in the street (Alfredo). Â BOB â€“ Excuse me, do you know what time it is, please? ALFREDO - Oh, yeah! This is exactly the question I put myself all the time. BOB - Excuse me? ALFREDO - I wish I knew...But sometimes I feel like I really know, you know what I mean? What is time? A serpent. A drop. An endless sheet. The distance between my childhood and the nearest star. I'm joking. Of course I know what time is. There are watches, clocks, bells all over the place. They don't leave you alone; they don't let you live in peace. BOB - Look, I didn't mean to bother you. It was just a question. ALFREDO - And I'll be happy to answer if you'd have a little time. BOB â€“ Well, I don't. ALFREDO â€“ How do you know? BOB â€“ What do you mean? ALFREDO - If you don't know what time is, how do you know you don't have any? BOB - Sorry but I'm really in a hurry. ALFREDO - Of course you are, everybody is. We are rushing, right? BOB â€“ Right. ALFREDO â€“ No use. BOB â€“ Still. ALFREDO â€“ Ah, you, Americans! Always on the run. You want to conquer the earth, the sky, everything. Fine. But what about time? BOB â€“ Can you tell me what it is, please? ALFREDO â€“ I think I could... BOB â€“ (impatient, he wants to leave) It was nice talking to you... ALFREDO â€“ You didn't talk to me... You didn't have time to talk to me. And it wasn't nice at all. BOB - Please excuse me now...I have to run. ALFREDO â€“ Don't. BOB â€“ Sorry? ALFREDO â€“ Don't be afraid, I'm not a madman, as it might have crossed your mind. BOB â€“ I don't think you are mad but... ALFREDO â€“ Although I could be, who knows? We all are. Or better said, since the mad are free the sane ones, very few, I assure you, should be quarantined. BOB â€“ Good point. ALFREDO â€“ I have some more. BOB â€“ I have no doubt but I don't have time now, can you understand that? ALFREDO â€“ Would you have later? BOB â€“ What? ALFREDO â€“ Time. BOB â€“ For what? ALFREDO â€“ For me, let's say. BOB â€“ Sir... ALFREDO â€“ For yourself, then. BOB â€“ Look, I need Right now! ALFREDO â€“ Now is the time. Believe me. BOB â€“ For what? ALFREDO â€“ For stopping all this running. In one life it comes a moment when you have to stop. I can feel now is your time. BOB â€“ Yeah, perfect moment! Why not drop everything when you are in the pick and go at leisure thinking of nothing?! ALFREDO â€“ See, you just asked the most important question in the world and now you want to run? BOB â€“ Sir, I have an important meeting. ALFREDO â€“ A matter of life and death, did I guess well? BOB â€“ More than that. ALFREDO â€“ Your job? BOB â€“ Now you are. ALFREDO â€“ A that brings you nothing. BOB- Oh, it does, believe me! ALFREDO â€“ Nothing but money, I mean. You're running like crazy from a place to another, from a meeting to another without understanding the essence of things, the essence of time... BOB â€“ Cheap clichÃ©s. ALFREDO â€“ Then here is another one also established by you: Time is money. But time is also a crack in the wall, an opened window to the vast sky, a flower blooming overnight, the silence of solitude and the passing noise of happiness, a summer afternoon in the country, your face reflected in the calm water of a lake older then yesterday and younger than tomorrow. Why don't you choose these clichÃ©s instead of time is money? Aren't they good enough to define time? Are they too weak or too strong for your feeling of time? Because, my friend, time is just a feeling, nothing more. No measure, no dimension, nothing to be touched, reached or counted. BOB - Nonsense. ALFREDO â€“ What makes sense then? BOB â€“ I don't have the big picture but I can tell you that for me, now, the sense is definitely to make it to my meeting. That's why I came to Rome. I'm paid well for that, I was flown first class, put in a five stars hotel where, by the way, I forgot my damn watch. Never happened before...Otherwise instead of wasting my time with you, now I would have been already in the conference room negotiating a contract. A very important contract, sir, I was brought here for a great mission. Jesus, look at me, I'm trying to explain myself now, that's unbelievable! ALFREDO â€“ Fair enough. BOB â€“ What a bad idea to stop you and ask for time! From all these people crossing streets I had to choose you! What a doomed day! ALFREDO â€“ It could turn out to be your lucky one, actually. BOB â€“ Tell me about it! ALFREDO . There is no time. BOB â€“ Great! ALFREDO â€“ Time doesn't exist. BOB â€“ I bet. ALFREDO â€“ It's only in our head. Ever is in there. We established the distance between 0 and 1, we started measuring, counting, parceling the universe, we invented the beginning and the end, we screw-up everything, put limits to the infinitum, to the Word that was given to us to keep it. And now we are struggling to surpass the limits. We invented the whole shit. And now we don't know how to handle it anymore. We lost control. BOB â€“ I'm loosing my patience. What do you want from me? ALFREDO â€“ Don't worry, I'm not a conman. I don't keep you busy with my talk just to steal your wallet. I guess this is what you think about Italians. Thieves. BOB â€“ Of course not. ALFREDO â€“ Of course not! You don't dare to say what you really think. Your politically correctness brainwashed. Left you with no attitude, no passion.Â I'm not saying Europeans are better. Xenophobes, you know? Trying to keep alive dead history, to rule in the memory of their lost empires. For instance, they admire America but they are Anti-Americans, precisely because they envy you, because you are the last empire of western power. And they are not shy to show it. BOB â€“That's your problem. For me it's enough. Bye, now! ALFREDO â€“ Listen, give me a moment. You asked me what time is...I could spend the whole day telling you about that, but now I'm asking you just for a moment. What is a moment in your long, fulfilled life? Nothing. And what is time? A long line of moments, right? BOB â€“ Right. ALFREDO â€“ But if a moment is nothing that means time is a long line of nothingness. BOB â€“ I couldn't care less at the moment. ALFREDO â€“ Wrong. You should care for every moment of your life. One moment can change everything. One moment ...and you're gone. BOB â€“ Is this part of your Latin mentality to talk so much, about everything? ForÂ Christ's sake, I asked you the most simple, normal question in the world. You could just have answered me the simplest way, it is 10:15, 10: 30, or even 11! Why all this torture? You probably use to think Americans are dry, standard folks. Well, let me tell you, it is better this way. We are at least precise and decent, and we save a lot of time. When somebody asks us in the street what time is it, we'll give him the answer right away: It is 10:30. That's it! ALFREDO â€“ It's much later than this. BOB â€“ Is it? Then is too late... ALFREDO - It was too late from the beginning. BOB â€“ You think so? ALFREDO â€“ It's always too late. BOB â€“ Can you be serious for a second? ALFREDO â€“ I'm serious most of the time. BOB â€“ So why do y

