Half-past Two

Once upon a schooltime

He did Something Very Wrong

(I forget what it was).

And She said he’d done

Something Very Wrong, and must

Stay in the school-room till half-past two.

(Being cross, she’d forgotten

She hadn’t taught him Time.

He was too scared of being wicked to remind her.)

He knew a lot of time: he knew

Gettinguptime, timeyouwereofftime,

Timetogohomenowtime, TVtime,

Timeformykisstime (that was Grantime).

All the important times he knew,

But not half-past two.

He knew the clockface, the little eyes

And two long legs for walking,

But he couldn’t click its language,

So he waited, beyond onceupona,

Out of reach of all the timefors,

And knew he’d escaped for ever

Into the smell of old chrysanthemums on Her desk,

Into the silent noise his hangnail made,

Into the air outside the window, into ever.

And then, My goodness, she said,

Scuttling in, I forgot all about you.

Run along or you’ll be late.

So she slotted him back into schooltime,

And he got home in time for teatime,

Nexttime, notimeforthatnowtime,

But he never forgot how once by not knowing time,

He escaped into the clockless land of ever,

Where time hides tick-less waiting to be born.

U. A. Fanthorpe