René Kaiser

Julian and the Guardians of Time

Book 5

The Stolen Hour



Book 5 · English edition

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The Stolen Hour

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Moments · Questions · Routes · Time

Who Does an Hour Belong To?

Dear children and everyone reading aloud,

Bottles full of light stand in the Hour Market. Julian’s name hangs from one. The trader Mael claims it holds Julian’s time. But Julian hasn’t given anybody an hour.

Anouk waits with a drawing for her grandmother. A dark gap shows on her own clock. Julian and Lio must understand the difference between this trace and a sales label.

These 25 illustrated chapters continue the first four Time books. The Chrona begins with Moment, Insight, Memory and Hope. Reading in order is recommended for the continuing story arc.

Bottled hours and time connections belong to this imaginary world. Hela, Mr Tick, the guardian and the market board handle records, securing and returns. Children help only with paper and light objects outside closed areas.

Read together and leave room for pauses. Waiting and resting don’t have to produce something grand in order to matter. Nobody needs to describe a personal loss; questions can stay with the characters.

Contents

1. The Bottle with Julian’s Name 6

2. The Market of Full Pockets 8

3. Anouk’s Drawing 10

4. Lenna at the Wagon Square 12

5. Hela’s Register 14

6. Mr Tick’s Large Glasses 16

7. The House with the Glass Roof 18

8. The Jar Called Later 20

9. Four Hands at the Connection 22

10. The Labels in Mael’s Pocket 24

11. Stop the Inflow First 26

12. A Name Needs a Place 28

13. Anouk’s Hour 30

Contents · continued

14. The Hour Already Used 32

15. A Message for Sorin 34

16. The Wrong Label 36

17. The Flower Seller’s Rest 38

18. A List Without Dates 40

19. Time for a Drawing 42

20. The Board Decides 44

21. A Plant in the Jar 46

22. The Scales Hand 48

23. An Open Hour 50

24. An Invitation at the Kitchen Table 52

25. The House on the Dial 54

CHAPTER 1

The Bottle with Julian’s Name



The guardian had checked the crossing to the market. Julian and Lio stood on solid paving before a stall full of glass bottles. Light shimmered inside each one.

A label on a little bottle said JULIAN.

He kept his hands to himself.

“What’s inside?”

The person behind the stall pulled their hat lower. The plum-coloured coat held more pockets than Julian could count at a glance.

“An hour Julian might need later.”

“Whose?”

“Yours, of course.”

A picture appeared inside the glass. Julian sat at a table. A girl held up a drawing, but the Julian in the picture didn’t look. Then the bottle went dark again.

“I haven’t given you an hour.”

The trader put a finger to their lips. A name badge on the coat read MAEL.

“I keep what people don’t use. You don’t have to take it back straight away.”

Lio stood beside Julian on all four paws. He didn’t jump up at the glass stall.

“First we’d like to know how it got inside.”

Julian looked at the Chrona in his hand. Leaf, spiral, folded map and closed bud were all there. No dark gap opened in his clock.

That didn’t tell him everything about the bottle. But a label with his name wasn’t proof that the trader possessed something of his either.

Mael drew a curtain across the bottles. The light disappeared, but Julian’s question didn’t.

CHAPTER 2

The Market of Full Pockets



Mael closed the stall and went through a back door. Julian didn’t follow into an unfamiliar cellar.

Lio sniffed the lower wooden frame.

“Sweet dust. Like old paper left in the sun too long.”

People crossed the market with clocks on chains and inside pockets. A tiny clock even hung from somebody’s shoe. Even so, many hurried from stall to stall.

A woman offered spare minutes for queues. Coins, a register and clearly completed agreements lay on her table. A man rearranged a play hour he had promised twice. His friends stood with him and agreed a new time.

“Is all of this forbidden?” Julian asked.

An adult market attendant shook her head.

“Agreed time connections are possible here. The people involved must consent. If something isn’t clear, ask our record keeper, Hela.”

She pointed to the office beside Mael’s stall. It had its own open entrance from the square.

Julian noted the name. He didn’t simply write THEFT beside every time stall.

A girl sat outside a drawing stall. On her lap lay the very picture he had seen in Mael’s bottle.

“Do you know me?” Julian asked.

“No. But earlier you looked past me. Afterwards I was missing an hour.”

He stopped a little distance away.

“I’ve only just arrived.”

The girl took out a small silver clock. A dark gap lay inside its face.

CHAPTER 3

Anouk’s Drawing



“My name’s Anouk,” the girl said.

Her drawing showed a woman with a crooked hat sitting at a window. A little bird hid among the flowers.

“My grandmother Lenna wanted to collect the picture before travelling on.”

“Where is she now?”

Anouk pointed towards the wagon square.

“Still there. But part of my waiting is missing.”

She explained that Mael had approached her and asked whether the hour was unused. Anouk had answered that she was waiting for her grandmother.

“Did the trader ask permission to take it?”

“No. Mael said waiting didn’t really count. Then suddenly it was later.”

Lio lowered his ears.

“Somebody who says that apparently hasn’t waited for anyone they like.”

Julian studied Anouk’s clock without taking it from her hand. The dark gap remained visible. His own Chrona looked different. Mael’s claim about Julian’s bottle therefore needed to be examined separately from Anouk’s missing time.

He wrote two lines in his notebook. Anouk had shown him her clock. The trader had shown him a name on glass.

“Perhaps I was supposed to believe my own time was inside,” he said.

He put a question mark beside that guess.

Anouk stroked her picture.

“Could we go to Lenna first? I don’t want to miss saying goodbye too.”

Julian closed his notebook at once. The next question could come along with them on the way.