

Ariel's Watch

Ariel had always thought her grandmother was a rather mysterious woman.

While other grandparents filled their days with gardening or baking, her grandmother preferred long, solitary walks and spoke in thoughtful riddles that often left Ariel feeling both curious and slightly bewildered.

On the morning of her eleventh birthday, her grandmother presented her with a small velvet box.

Inside lay a silver watch.

It was delicate yet striking, its face encircled by tiny engraved stars that shimmered when they caught the light. The second hand moved with perfect precision, ticking softly — almost cautiously — as though it were guarding a secret.

“Be careful with it now, won’t you,” her grandmother said, holding Ariel’s gaze longer than usual. “Don’t misuse it.”

Ariel had laughed politely, though she found the warning rather odd. Misuse a watch? It wasn’t as if she planned to fling it across the playground.

“Thank you, Grandma,” she said, fastening it around her wrist.

As always, Ariel’s brown hair fell neatly over her shoulders, and her thoughtful brown eyes reflected the watch’s gleam.

She had no idea that her life was about to change.

The catastrophe nearly began with a maths test.

Ariel sat at her desk, pencil poised, staring at a question that seemed to grow more ferocious each time she read it.

If a train leaves Manchester at...

She groaned quietly.

Around her, the classroom was silent except for the faint scratch of pencils. Even Mr Hargreaves, who usually meandered between the desks offering encouragement, had settled at the front with a book.

Ariel glanced at the clock.

Five minutes left.

Panic fluttered in her chest.

Without thinking, she pressed the small button on the side of her watch.

Tick.

Silence.

Not ordinary silence — something deeper.

Something wrong.

She looked up.

Mr Hargreaves stood frozen mid-step.

A pencil hovered in the air where it had slipped from someone's fingers.

Outside the window, a bird hung motionless between two wingbeats.

Ariel blinked.

Once. Twice.

"Hello?" she whispered.

No answer.

Her heart hammered.

Slowly, she stood. Her chair made no sound against the floor.

She walked past Amelia, whose aloof expression was permanently fixed as she stared at her paper.

Ariel leaned over.

And read the answer.

A thrill shot through her.

She returned to her seat, copied it down, then pressed the button again.

Tick.

The world lurched back into motion.

The pencil clattered to the floor.

The bird completed its flight.

Mr Hargreaves resumed walking as though nothing had happened.

Ariel stared at her watch.

"What...?" she whispered.

But deep inside, excitement began to bloom.

It started with small things.

At lunch, when her favourite sticky toffee pudding ran out, Ariel pressed the button and calmly stepped behind the counter to serve herself an extra portion.

During a hockey match, she stopped time just long enough to tap the ball into the goal.

Her team cheered.

"You're unstoppable today!" her friend Molly laughed.

Ariel smiled, though guilt prickled faintly beneath her triumph.

Soon, using the watch became almost effortless.

Forgotten homework? Stop time and finish it.

Dropped pen? Catch it before it hit the floor.

Spelling test? A quick glance at someone else's answers.

Yet the victories felt strangely hollow.

When she scored the winning goal again the following week, the cheers washed over her like distant echoes rather than warm praise.

She hadn't earned them.

One afternoon, as she sat alone beneath the oak tree at the edge of the playground, Ariel realised something unsettling.

The pudding tasted less sweet.

The victories felt less bright.

Even laughter seemed thinner somehow.

Good things, she thought, lose their appeal when you don't work for them.

She turned the watch slowly on her wrist.

Had her grandmother known?

The answer came sooner than she expected.

It happened on a grey Tuesday.

Ariel was returning a library book when she heard sharp voices near the bike racks.

"Give it back!" a small boy cried.

Two older pupils loomed over him. One snatched the boy's hat and tossed it high into the air.

The boy jumped helplessly.

The bullies laughed.

Ariel's stomach twisted.

She glanced around.

No teachers.

No one noticing.

Her fingers hovered over the watch.

For a moment, she hesitated.

Then she pressed the button.

Tick.

The world froze.

She stepped forward and gently retrieved the hat from the air. Then she positioned it back on the boy's head and moved the bullies several steps away, turning them so they faced the opposite direction.

After a pause, she pressed the button again.

Tick.

The boy blinked in confusion, clutching his hat.

The bullies frowned, clearly unsure how they had ended up elsewhere.

Ariel walked over.

"Come on," she said kindly to the boy. "Let's get you inside."

"Th-thank you," he whispered.

For the first time since discovering the watch, warmth spread through her chest — real warmth.

Not the fleeting thrill of cheating.

Something deeper.

Something right.

After that day, Ariel saw opportunities everywhere.

She stopped a glass beaker from shattering in science before it could cause injury.

She caught a Reception child just as he tripped on the playground steps.

During a sudden storm, she paused time long enough to close classroom windows before rain drenched the reading corner.

Yet she was careful — never showy, never careless.

Power, she realised, demanded responsibility.

Still, the greatest test was yet to come.

It was the final bell on a windy afternoon when catastrophe almost struck.

A loose branch, shaken by ferocious gusts, cracked loudly above the school gate where pupils gathered to go home.

Ariel saw it tilt.

Heard the splintering wood.

Watched as it began to fall — directly toward a cluster of younger children.

Her breath caught.

She pressed the watch.

Tick.

The branch hung suspended, leaves trembling in the frozen air.

Working quickly, Ariel guided the children out of harm's way, pulling one boy's backpack clear where it had snagged on the fence.

Only when everyone stood safely aside did she press the button again.

The branch crashed harmlessly onto empty pavement.

Teachers rushed forward, startled but relieved.

No one knew what had truly happened.

Except Ariel.

She exhaled slowly.

This time, the feeling that filled her was not excitement.

It was quiet pride.

That evening, Ariel visited her grandmother.

"I know about the watch," she said softly.

Her grandmother smiled — not surprised in the slightest.

"I wondered how long it would take."

"Why me?" Ariel asked.

"Because power reveals character," her grandmother replied. "At first, it tempts us. But eventually, we must choose the kind of person we wish to be."

Ariel thought of the pudding, the hockey goals, the copied answers.

Then she thought of the little boy... the falling branch.

“I understand now,” she said.

Her grandmother squeezed her hand.

“With great power,” she said gently, “comes great responsibility.”

Ariel nodded.

She would not misuse the watch again.

Not because she feared consequences...

...but because she had discovered something far more valuable than the ability to stop time.

She had discovered who she wanted to be within it.

And from that day forward, while the world continued its endless ticking, Ariel used her rare gift not to get ahead — but to lift others up.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Ariel initially find her grandmother's warning strange?

- A) She did not like receiving presents
- B) A watch seemed harmless and ordinary
- C) She already owned several watches
- D) Her grandmother often told jokes

2. Which word best describes Ariel's feelings when she first stopped time?

- A) Indifferent
- B) Furious
- C) Astonished
- D) Bored

3. What does the word *aloof* most nearly mean in the passage?

- A) Friendly
- B) Distant
- C) Nervous
- D) Confused

4. Why did Ariel's achievements begin to feel "hollow"?

- A) She was tired of school
- B) Her friends ignored her
- C) She had not truly earned them
- D) Teachers were too strict

5. What caused Ariel to reconsider how she used the watch?

- A) Fear of being caught
- B) A conversation with Molly
- C) Realising that unearned success felt empty
- D) Losing the watch briefly

6. Which event BEST shows Ariel accepting responsibility?

- A) Helping the bullied boy
- B) Copying answers during a test
- C) Serving herself extra pudding
- D) Winning the hockey match

7. The falling branch mainly serves to show that:

- A) Ariel enjoys excitement
- B) The watch is unreliable
- C) Her powers can prevent serious harm
- D) The school grounds are unsafe

8. What is the CENTRAL message of the story?

- A) Rules should never be broken
- B) Time is more important than friendship
- C) Intelligence guarantees success
- D) True character is revealed by how we use power

Answers

1. B

2. C

3. B

4. C

5. C

6. A

7. C

8. D