

Grandfather Clock

By: Jaidyn A. Carlile

11:59 PM read the face on the wall. The chimes would ring any second from the downstairs neighbor. The hourly howls of a grandfather clock likely older than its decrepit owner echoed throughout the complex. A reminder of how much time had passed. It wasn't often a pleasant reminder, especially not the twisted harmony that came from the time-worn wood of the thing downstairs. It often left me wondering why she couldn't have been the type of woman to adorn her home with cocoo clocks instead of that god awful clock.

There it was shaking the walls of my room; it would last for just a minute although it always felt much longer. Her flat was at least three doors down the hall below. I could only imagine the constant dismay of people unfortunate enough to live directly next to that woman. The old woman wasn't rude of course, not by any means.

That only made it harder to complain. She was pleasant. She frequently invited other tenants over for tea. She lived with her grandson a charming young man near my age. I assume he takes care of the woman in her dwindling state. She doesn't look a day over 99. *How does he bare that clock?* I hate it with every fiber of my being! That's exactly why I am going to destroy it.

Its 12:07 AM and I am now on the old woman's floor a few doors down from hers. I can hear the rhythmic ticks from here. I know I just missed the boy. Four days a week, he hears screams at 12AM to tell him it's time for work. He wouldn't be home until half an hour after the

9AM chime would shake the building. The old woman is alone. Living with that clock she must be the world's heaviest sleeper. That should make my job easy.

The boy leaves a key in a fake rock in the planter by the door for trusted neighbors to check on the woman if he isn't home on time. I know the layout of their flat as I have often been invited for tea. It was convenient that the clock sat on the wall opposite the TV in the living room.

By 12:13 AM I was inside her residence. The ticks of the clock in the otherwise complete silence rattled my bones in an unnerving way. It was never this bad during the day. It made me want to rip teeth out of my mouth.

I could only stare hypnotized by its delicate hands as they danced across its wretched face. The wood looked rotten in the moonlight. Its body twisted and contorted in a way I had been oblivious to before now.

It's now 12:21 AM and I could not shake the sense of paralysis. My bones were metal poles planted in the earth's core, solid and unmoving. Unlike the normal chill of metal, it burns me from within as if the devil himself has graced me with his touch; if I could hear anything besides the awful ticking, I'm sure it would be my flesh sizzling.

I can move. My trance is broken although I have wasted far too much time. 12:37 AM, it mocks me. It thinks I won't do what I came for. It paints me a scared fool. I am not.

My footsteps heavy, and my feet drag with every step. I must be loud but, thus the clicks which sound more like a throbbing heartbeat drown out everything. Only took me five minutes to stand face to face with the beast. I have plenty of time much to the dismay of my victim.

I open its chest with a horrid crack of breaking bones. The noise only grows and my vision blurs. My skull is pounding. The stench is far worse than anything. I can taste my spaghetti dinner in my throat. When I reach for its pendulum, it is slick with... oil? No. The room is dark, but this substance is much darker than that. The faint moonlight slipping into the room would almost convince me it was red. I don't have time to ponder this. I must do what I came for. 12:45 AM and time is running out.

Reaching further into its chest past the squishy flesh behind the pendulum. Deeper than I would have ever expected a clock to need to be, I found it. The source of the beating that drove me mad, the life source of the grandfather clock. It's beating heart pulsating in my hands. The rate increases, trying to fight me off with its awful noise that makes my head ache. On the verge of keeling over, but I cannot fail. Not now. Not so close to the reward. Using all my strength I rip the heart from the chest. Quiet. Its face was frozen with its hands pointed at 12:51 AM.

The trip back to my flat is a blur. It feels like a nine-inch nail is being driven into my eye socket. But I am home staring at my wall and the face reads 12:59 AM. I know I will not hear the chimes and that I can rest easy and hopefully the old man can too. END.