

## Old Grandfather Clock

1.

There was once an aged grandfather clock, which stood tall on my aunt's wooden floor. When I was ten, I would take note of every piece of machinery that, when put together, became Old Grandfather. The smooth panels on either side of the then gigantic monstrosity shone like the sheen of a glow stick when the sun's warm rays hit the window from the east. Old Grandfather's face was greyed like paper, and spotted. For eyebrows, the clock had a mechanical painting of the sun rising and falling, the moon falling and rising. I could take peace in the constant sway of the bob, like a hypnotist's golden attempt for his patient's slumber. Back and forth. Back and forth. Always on time.

11.

I was startled to find that Old Grandfather was actually haunted. My cousin Joey said so himself. When the black arrows of the clock both swung upwards to mark midnight, a ghost would step out of the glass as natural as a living being through a swinging door. The ghost, Joey explained, belonged to a malevolent spirit of a young woman from near two hundred years ago. She fell in love with a man who in turn loved her for her money. When they were wed, the gentleman cut deep into her neck and relieved her of a head filled with foolishness. The rich man then buried the head seed deep and deep. From that spot grew a tree, which grew into the grandfather clock. Now the woman's ghost would melt from the clock's memory, on the very moment she learned of heartbreak the hard way, to scare all who were near to see. All the complete truth, Joey made sure to assure me before he left for college, leaving me to ponder.

111.

Staying the night was never a chore at my aunt's house before that day Joey decided I should be informed. When I learned of the ghost in Old Grandfather, though, I could barely hide in the guestroom fast enough the next time I visited. Getting to sleep was another matter when I knew of the supernatural business that would occur just one floor below me. Better to know where one's enemy hides than to only guess, and so I flew downstairs later that night and faced the offending piece of furniture. I brought nothing but a flashlight and a paintbrush sure that neither would work, but feeling being unarmed was a stupidity I could not afford. Old Grandfather stood in the hallway like a cloaked shadow of unending black. How could I believe that the clock could ever be grandfatherly? I could see his face crooked and gearing towards a malicious midnight meant for me. My hands were itchy. Legs, barely able to support my jellified body. I counted out loud as the seconds were shaved off.

“Fifty-eight, fifty-nine, sixty.”

Old Grandfather tolled deep and demanding like dignified thunder.

**DONG DONG DONG**

Was that a glimmer in the glass?

**DONG DONG DONG**

A long face, shrouded by thorn thicket hair?

**DONG DONG DONG**

I dropped my flashlight. I needed to pick it up because  
something was coming. Something straight at me.

**DONG DONG DONG**

I quickly found my flashlight, raising the contraption up towards whatever it was that longed to touch me. To stroke the smooth child's skin of my face and release “Aaah,” a breath of ghostly relief. But

the path of my light only touched Old Grandfather's face. He smiled grimly back at me, and I could feel the tips of what could only be disappointment.

Piano

Jeremy possessed many wrinkles piled one on top of another (over eyes, under eyes, upon the head, beneath the chin, doubling, tripling the further down his wraith body) that one would hope that there would be a day; a day where the old man could swiftly take off his coat of wrinkles, set the baggy flesh aside on the seat of a chair, and begin anew as the young man he truly was under pounds of used up skin.

If you pulled back the oceans of bags underneath the man's brows, you would see lightning green eyes. Eyes that were used to skimming musical notes from an open page. Bouncing from one quarter note to the slur of another. Sparkling when staccato struck out in stinging slaps on piano keys. Collapsing into a caress of C minor. Music curled dormant in his irises. An ancient memory that sunk into Jeremy's legs where even now, when it's hard to see and he must rely on his own repertoire of repetition, he can tap out the beat of multiple melodies.

Connected to each tone, each trill, each tinkle is a spark of Carla's crinkling her smile just for him. A crescendo of Tina's first tottering steps, the eighth notes that prelude Vincent's vivacious turn from teenager to adult. Dull walking paces for Carla's last overture. Notes shifting to flats when arthritis permanently took the piano from Jeremy. A stage sitting empty with the actor standing ready.

But now Jeremy's fingers itch as if thousands of tiny mosquitoes bit every centimeter of his baggy skin, leaving angry welts. Aching to play. There, in the furthest right hand corner of the sparse room allotted to him, stands a grand piano. Though the old man cannot see the instrument, he can picture it. Form a scene where he positions himself on the bench. Cracks his knuckles. *Pop, crunch, snap.* Reaches out to press the keys. To recite the music that might bring them all back.

At seven, Sophie had just experienced an exciting swim at the Sunny Side pool. She left in the morning with her outrageous pink explosion of a leotard, a poolside game, and a disgruntled but kind father. Together they learned that the 5' to 9' deep slice of pool was introduced too early and that the water slides were a better fit for the pair, ate at least five orders of steaming nachos topped with sublime cheese and meat, and sunburned about two forearms each. Despite whatever miniscule maladies, Sophie settled in her frilly bed that night with the buzz of contentment. But something terrifying wriggled deep in her chest, and her terror brightened eyes wildly as she thought—

*Today won't ever happen again.  
I could go to the pool, wear the  
same clothes, eat the same chips,  
and swim the same cool places.  
But that time won't be today.  
There will be a new Monday  
with different people. I could  
go slide, but I would remember  
to plug my ears so water can't  
get in. Dad might laugh then, but  
today's was something more  
like a chuckle. I won't  
ever get today back.*

Sophie told her father these sentiments with hysteric tears crowding her face. He patted her curled hair, telling her that she was too young to think such things. She could worry about troubled thoughts when she grew into a woman. Until then, Sophie feared the time when being a little girl was her only safety.

When I was eleven, I read a book. A book filled with stories meant to chill young children into their bedroom covers. From within the transcribed tales I plucked only two legends: do not sleep on the left side of a hotel's bed else a ghost in the mirror shall take your soul, and the last gun of the world brings the last bullet. Being only a child, I read these quickly, gulping the words like highly appetizing soup while eating real gravy and potatoes at Schooners. I forgot to imprint those words behind my eyes, and thus forget I did the entirety of the second story.

Ten years later, the memory of this book, more of a legend itself, poked its way into my thoughts like a needy feline. What, indeed, was the true story of the last gun? I searched the Normal Public Library, the place of my enchanted childhood, for any and all books of young adult terror. I could not locate the novel. Perhaps it was sold to make space for *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*. Maybe it still rests there. I'm afraid I shall never read those words again, and isn't this the true horror intended from my childhood library rental?

Serenade

Clouds fill a mottled night sky

like large knuckled hands clasping,  
one knotted joint after another.  
Thickened coils of solid, clotted  
rain writhe deep in the sky, pining  
to crack open on my speeding car.  
I am late for my work's night shift;  
am more interested in the imagined  
*snap* when one minute murders  
her brother to take his place. I  
clench my jaw tight until my teeth  
burn with pressure, wanting to avoid  
the shame that is paired with  
untimeliness. Above is a mess of  
battling lightning strikes, or a game  
of electric paintball mythical gods  
desired to attempt. Air collects  
on the hairs dusting my arms,  
sprinkling up to my neck. Eyes wide  
I finally notice the deafening silence  
that was thrown like a heavy  
woolen blanket over my body.  
I try to gasp, but the murky  
gray of the land clogs and  
collects in the cusp of my throat.  
I am sure time has been dipped  
in a fine drizzle of amber,  
crystalizing this moment along  
with others, encouraging me to  
recollect how the land can swallow  
me whole. I make a shape with my  
mouth attempting to speak, but—  
Rain rips the world to ribbons.  
Scraps of sky and lightning-  
paint pile mercilessly to my  
windshield, blocking vital views  
of rain-splattered road. Drops  
crash like tiny drums pattering  
*thump thump*  
in the swollen pit of my chest.  
My throat is still stuck with a  
word; am sure if I pull to the shoulder,  
misplacing lost seconds meant for  
work, and open the car's door,  
I could stride outside. Arms out as if  
I could offer the music trilling  
in the back of my head to the  
cacophony of nature. Thundering

out of my whole body. Shouting  
and drawing the vowels out like  
deep bow strokes on a violin:  
**“Do not leave me.”**