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## Clockwork

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# CLOCKWORK

Kynzee Mann

**T** *ik. Tik. Tik.*

Robert's eyes darted upwards, making contact with the smooth dome hung crooked on the wall. His sunken face took in every twitch caused by the moving hands. It was a rather mundane clock. A black ring with black hands and black numbers. The small red hand counting the seconds is what Robert fixated on. He felt it mocked him. Robert sat at a square wooden table covered in a plain white tablecloth. He clenched his jaw; calloused hands clutched the handle of a bread knife so tightly, it would surely leave a mark for hours.

The faded smell of cooked chicken hung over the small apartment. The actual bird rested surrounded by chopped carrots and potatoes, soggy from bathing in the broth for too long. Robert's eyes followed a bead of condensation as it slipped down an estranged glass, the ice having melted long ago. He snuck a glance at the time again, but not even a minute had passed since he last checked. He looked around the room, and took in the brown cupboards and atrocious yellow wallpaper. When he first moved in he hated everything about this place, but she had loved it. She had desperately wanted to decorate it, and after weeks of begging, Robert had given in. He regretted it now when he made eye contact with a small fox figurine. Its sharp eyes bore into his own, a knowing smile on its face.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

Plates and silverware rattled as Robert's forehead met the edge of the table. He found the pain helped soothe him for a moment and made his head feel a bit more clear. Robert lifted his head, and dropped it, once again the force caused the glass and metal on the table to shuffle and collide. The pain caused spots and shadows to flash behind his closed eyelids. He sat for a moment and watched the mirage of colors dance around his darkened vision. Once the pain had subsided, he considered doing it again. However, when he made the effort to lift his head he couldn't seem to find the strength. Robert opened his eyes and the faded brown carpet came into focus. Robert observed a quarter, pressed underneath one of the legs of the chair. He had put it there months ago, after she

complained of the tipping motion making her uncomfortable. *Robert, it drives me crazy, just fix it will you?* And so he did. Maybe not how she would have liked, but it worked for him.

*Tik. Tik. Tok.*

Robert's head whipped up, the weakness he felt before gone in a moment. The deeper click of the clock indicated a full minute having passed. He stood up and rushed to where the front door resided, only a few feet away from the table. He took caution not to slam into the door, for Robert would hate to startle her by causing a commotion. Gently as he could, he leaned forward and met his eye to the peephole. The familiar filth of the complex hallway filled his vision. The white corridor was empty, not a soul in sight. He waited a moment, his breath coming and going in short bursts.

Robert felt acrimony fill his chest, an acidic burn clawed at the back of his throat. With shaking hands, he found the gold chain hanging between the door and wall and slid the lock off. He grabbed the handle and pulled the door open. He tried his best not to swing it too violently, nervous that she would appear on the other side at any moment. He strolled into the hallway, looking first down the direction of the elevator, the way she always came. Silence turned and greeted him with a smile. Robert did not smile back. Instead, he rotated himself to face the opposite end of the hall, which he knew only led to more rooms. An open window sent a cool breeze prancing around him, and he smelled the city on its breath. Robert turned back to face the direction of the elevator. He took a deep breath and tried to reason with himself, "I'll wait one more second. She'll be here. Just one more second."

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

Even from the hallway he could hear that damn clock. Its ticking filled his head, reaching every crease of his brain, every corner of his mind. Robert's muscles felt stiff, he clenched one hand to his heart as if he could stop the barrage of emotions erupting throughout his body. His jaw was tight, and he shut his eyes. He took a deep breath, and felt the ache of resentment deep in his chest. He spun around and stomped back into his apartment. He locked the door back up, he didn't want her to know how desperate he was for her. He made his way back to the table and plopped into his chair.

His eyes bounced over the meal he had spent hours preparing. He didn't know why he was so worried. Of course she was coming, he had done so much for her! He had researched different recipes and the right

spices to use. For God's sake, he had even made broth from scratch! He had gone to her favorite bakery, bought her favorite pie: it was key-lime. He didn't even like key-lime. He had decorated, too. His grandmother's crystal, his father's china, and in the center of the table were a dozen red roses standing in a vase he knew she liked. He always thought it was dumb and old. *It's vintage Robert, it's coming back!* It didn't matter if he liked it or not, Robert bought it because she thought it was beautiful.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

The clock was her idea too. *It's so soothing, isn't it?* There was nothing soothing about that goddamn clock. It ticked away at him, day after day, poking and prodding like a bully to a kid.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

Everything he did, he did for her. He decorated, he learned to cook, he got rid of his favorite recliner. He had a cat once, it was his best friend, but she was allergic so the cat had to go. He would lay in front of a train for her, *so why the hell wasn't she here?*

*Tik. Tik. Tok.*

Robert slammed his hands down on the table. He planted his feet and stood, causing the chair behind him to fly back. The walls of the small apartment played ball with the resounding *bang* of wood on tile. He pulled his lips into a wide grin, his crooked yellow teeth displayed. He grabbed the simple white tablecloth in both of his hands and, with one big pull, everything flew off the table and crashed into the floor. Plates and crystal shattered, the shards found rest deep in the stained carpet. The roses scattered, glass and petals mingled making the room look like a murder scene. Robert watched in sick satisfaction as the chicken tumbled across the room. Water and wine painted the table cloth until it resembled a modern art piece he once saw with her. *I really feel this one, don't you Robert?* No, he hadn't felt anything for the painting and he certainly didn't feel anything for the ruined cloth now reclining peacefully on the floor.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

He grabbed the fallen chair and placed it back next to the table. It wobbled a bit, the quarter no longer supporting the front leg. Robert lifted his foot and placed it in the center of the seat. He pulled himself up, and swung his other foot down on the table. His knee made an awful popping noise as he hoisted himself up onto the wooden furniture. He took a moment to appreciate the chaos that now surrounded the table before turning back to the task at hand. When Robert faced his tormen-

tor, though, he met his own eyes instead. Pale skin with pale hair and pale eyes. His cheeks are sunken and sagged. He shouldn't look this old. When did he get this old? He reached for the crooked clock, and lifted it up off the nail. He gripped it so tightly that his knuckles started turning white. He felt that if he's not careful, it would pop up and get away from him. With the clock in his hands, Robert thought the ticking would be unbearable but somehow it seemed softer. Slower, too. He realized that it must be what she was talking about when she said it soothed her. He almost found himself feeling pity for the clock, but it was quickly overtaken by enmity. The clock was like a dog that bites then cowers in fear. He could almost see the clock whining, hiding its tail deep between its legs. He would not be bitten again.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

Robert knew what needed to be done. He sat down on the table and slid to the edge so his legs dangled over. With the clock in one hand, he used the other to push himself off with. His knees locked, which caused him to stumble forwards. He lost a slipper in the process of regaining his balance, but it doesn't register. His mind was obsessing, his salvation the only thought in his mind. He careened towards the window sitting patiently on the wall. Robert took his free hand and pushed the frame out. He grunted in frustration when he was met with resistance, and noticed as the lock acted coy.

He never locked the window, he lived on the ninth floor, for God's sake. It was her that always locked it. *You never know!* Was what she used to justify herself. Robert ground his teeth in newfound resentment. He leaned over and pulled the lock open. He then pushed on the frame once again. It slid over with a groan and a wave of air flooded the room. The dazzling lights and metal mountains would normally have brought awe to Robert's mind. He doesn't waste time enjoying it now, though. Instead he pushed at the screen between him and the city. It popped off easily, and he watched as it fell to the street below. He leaned up against the frame of the window, the edge dug into his stomach. He took the arm holding the clock and lifted it high above his head.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*

Robert hesitated for a moment, the weight in his chest almost unbearable. He couldn't understand his own anguish. He pulled his arm back, and flung the clock out towards the town. It happened fast, but slow, too. He watched as it spun and flew in an arc shape. It gained speed as it made its way down, but he could still clearly see the red hand ticking

away, uncaring of its own impending doom. He lost sight of the falling object, but the sound of startled metal and panicked plastic echoed through the night.

The man's shoulders fell, his entire body relaxed now. Robert took a few steps back, away from the window. A shaking hand found its way to a sweat-soaked forehead, and he used the sleeve of his grey sweater to wipe at the moisture. A small chuckle escaped his cracked lips. Robert turned away from the shining town below, and shuffled his feet back across the apartment floor. He heard a soft crunch come from below his foot, and looked down to investigate. His grandmother's nice crystal surrounded him in pieces. It is only now that he noticed one of his slippers had abandoned the other, and this caused him to laugh once again. He stepped forth with his bare foot, and though he registered the slivers of glass that slid into his skin, Robert didn't feel any pain. He made his way back to the table and the cool surface felt refreshing to him as he laid his hands upon it.

He used the tabletop to find balance, and gradually lowered himself back into the seat. Regardless of the tipping motion the chair had, he felt this to be the most comfortable piece of furniture he'd ever had the chance to sit on. The chair groaned as he released the tension in his body. He stretched his legs out in front of him, and he shook loose his one remaining slipper. Robert looked down at his hands. He found himself staring back through the eyes of a clock.

*Tik. Tik. Tik.*