

*The Clock*

Tick.

    Tock.

        Tick.

            Tock.

The clock.

    I awoke to the tedious chiming sound of the old tin bell in the ornately carved mahogany clock on the grey wall.

    Ringing. Ringing. Ringing.

12:00.

    I couldn't tell if the ringing was coming from the old clock or my deafened bleeding ears. Oh how I hated the ringing.

    My eyes cracked open like the concrete of a crumbling wall, slowly; I felt the tired red veins bulging against my corneas as they struggled for oxygen.

    Lights. All around me. Attacking me from every direction.

    They blinded me. I could not think, yet one could not usually think in such darkening light as this.

    I waited for my red eyes to adjust to the blinding white light around me. The flickering lights on. Every hour of every day. Lights. A kind of torture. The only way to escape the light was to enter the dark. Oh how I hated the lights.

    As my eyes finally began to take in their surroundings, they only saw the familiar old walls of the miniscule concrete room that I sat in, waiting. All day. All night. Waiting.

    The creaky sanatorium sat all around me, taunting me with its cruel loneliness. The old solemn white room around me sat there, mocking me.

It mocked.

    And mocked.

        And mocked.

    It grew larger and larger the longer I lied there in my bed. The old white brick walls of the ward ripped as they stretched further away from my body. The cold concrete floors stretched and lengthened

beneath my rusted metal bed. I slowly sat up. I heard my back and neck crack as the vertebrae struggled to hoist my weight to an upright position. I choked as my throat constricted for air.

I sat there in the grim room, turning my head around 360 degrees and back around to take in the blank nothingness in the room where nothing was hidden. There was nothing in the tiny little room.

Nothing but me, my bed, and the old wooden clock.

I tried to unstrap the leather cuffs that restrained my hands to the cold withered bed frame but I could not do so. I pulled harder. I needed to move. I could feel the bugs crawling down my arms and wrists and beneath my skin, slowly working their way into my veins. I needed to get them. I had to get the bugs out from underneath my skin. I shook my arms as fast and as hard as I could, but I could not remove my chafing wrists from the brown rawhide restraints.

Tick.

I felt the bugs digging. They must be very hungry.

The bugs dug and dug and dug, deeper.

Digging.

I began to laugh while I shook in my bed. I shook my wrists harder, but my attempts to escape the restraints were futile as I soon only felt the rough leather rubbing my wrists raw. I laughed maniacally while the bugs tore through my skin. The pain of the bugs digging through my arms built up to the point where it was unbearable. A searing pain jolted through me, and I felt as if nails were being stuck through my wrists. I could not take it. I kept laughing.

All of the sudden, it stopped. I felt nothing, I didn't feel the bugs in my veins anymore. They were gone. I began to laugh harder. This happens every day. Every day, at twelve o' clock, the bugs come, and I laugh.

I laugh.

And I laugh.

And I laugh.

I don't know why I am laughing. I don't have control. I feel my diaphragm repeatedly thrusting mechanically upwards, colliding with my abdomen to produce a sharp tone of hoarse laughter that I could not stop. Oh how I hate the laughter.

Tock.

Suddenly, like a sharp knife bringing a dry slit to the movement in my throat, I hear a small sound. A tiny, shrieking peep. A small coo similar to the cries of an infant bird. My tired eyes dart around the confined concrete room looking for the source of the noise. I hear it again. A word. One single word.

“Feed.”

Confused, I continued to search the empty room, yet there was nothing.

Until I looked at the old clock on the wall.

Sitting on the base platform of the bird house on the old wooden clock was a small wooden cuckoo bird, painted bright blue and vibrant yellow to contrast with the dark brown of the shining mahogany wood of the clock.

I was surprised to see the small bird. I had never before seen the creature before in all of the time that I had spent in the room. The bird called out again, softly.

“Feed.”

I was confused. I did not know what the small wooden bird wanted.

“What do you mean, feed?” I asked the bird.

The cuckoo only responded with the same word, yet again.

“I do not know what you are asking for,” I replied calmly. “Would you like me to feed you?”

The bird tilted its wooden head on its axis.

Tick.

“Not feed me,” the bird stated in a small voice. “Feed *you*.”

The bird had a sinister look in its little, black, beady eyes.

I didn’t know what the bird was talking about. I was not hungry at all. The nurses had just been in recently with my morning meal.

I wasn’t hungry.

The bird seemed to notice the confused look that I held on my face.

*I’m not hungry*, I thought to myself.

“Oh, but you are hungry,” the bird replied, seemingly reading my thoughts, its piercing hellish eyes staring directly into mine.

Tock.

“No,” I told the bird. “The routine nurse came in at nine o’ clock this morning and gave me my usual breakfast meal. I am not hungry at all.”

“I don’t remember any nurse entering this room,” said the bird. “That old door over there hasn’t been touched in weeks.”

“I specifically remember my breakfast this morning. I had two pieces of bread, and the nurse gave me my daily medication,” I snapped back at the bird. I began to feel the bugs again. Overwhelming darkness.

“You did not receive any breakfast this morning. Don’t you remember? You’ve been asleep, silly,” the cuckoo said with a menacing smile.

I thought hard about the morning. I had woken up, been fed, given my medication, the daily routine. It was the same every day, and I vividly remember it from this morning.

Tick.

The more I thought about it however, the more I seemed to forget whether I had actually been fed that morning. I tried to recall the events that had happened earlier that day. I dug through my brain, but I simply could not remember the last time that the nurses had come in to give me my food. I felt the bugs. They dug deeper into my brain with each increasingly torturous second that I sat in that old bed.

It has seemed that the last time I could remember someone opening the metal rusted door was many weeks ago, only to give me my medication. After that, everything was a blur of thick fog.

I looked up at the old wooden clock on the grey wall, into the black eyes of the little blue bird.

“Aren’t you hungry?” the bird asked.

“Hungry?” I asked.

I thought about it. I wasn’t hungry. The bird had been mistaken.

“Hungry,” the bird repeated, staring into my swollen red eyes.

Tock.

The bugs crawled. I felt them, moving deeper and deeper into my head. I could feel their legs crawling over my brain, distorting my thought. They bit and clawed at my temporal lobe. I could feel the blood leaking in my brain. Then I immediately understood what the bird spoke of. I felt it only slightly at first, but then the pain took over. I felt an awful pain in my stomach. I could feel the acid churning within my stomach like waves in a black sea, demanding to be calmed. Yet, I did not have any food of sustenance to suffice my pained appetite.

“Hungry... Hungry... Hungry.” The words poured from my mouth, slower and slower with each time that I said it.

“When was the last time you had something to eat?” The little bird asked, a strange menacing tone to its voice.

I felt the acid in my stomach, trying to fight its way up my throat. It wanted to tear through the tissue in my esophagus. It wanted to make me bleed. I could feel it.

I struggled to spit the words out of my mouth without releasing anything other than the raspy tone of my voice. "I can't remember," I slowly said to the bird.

"That's right," said the cuckoo, smiling. "You can't remember."

"I can't remember," I repeated in a daze.

The little bird was now perched directly in front of the 6 on the face of the clock. "Now, wouldn't you like some nice food to calm that stomach ache of yours?"

I nodded. I could feel my mouth watering as I continued to think about eating. My brain was numb.

Tick.

"Oh!" said the little blue bird, "it appears that we don't have any food in this tiny room of yours, and considering that you won't be able to get out of those restraints, we'll have to find some other type of food for you to eat." The bird looked directly at me.

"Yes," I murmured. "Food... to eat. Food... food... food."

My hunger had overcome my mind. I was capable of thinking about nothing but the intense pain that I was feeling in my stomach. I had to clench my throat tightly to refrain from dry heaving. Food. I needed food.

"What kind of food would you like to eat?" the bird asked.

I couldn't think straight. I needed to eat. I felt my stomach lining eating itself to try to stop itself from starving.

"Anything," I replied sluggishly.

"How about... some meat?" The little bird was staring directly into my eyes now with his piercing black pupils, smiling insidiously.

Tock.

The word hit my brain like a bullet.

Meat.

"Meat?" I asked, excitedly.

"That's right," said the little bird, "and I know just the place we can get some."

"You do?" I asked, my head spinning from starvation.

"I do," the bird laughed in reply. "But you can only have the meat if you do exactly as I tell you to. Do you understand?" the little cuckoo asked cunningly.

“I understand.”

“Now,” said the blue bird on the clock, “I want you to put your finger into your mouth.”

I did exactly as the bird on the clock said. I bent over the wrist restraint and put the middle finger of my left hand in my mouth, slowly. I was unsure what the little bird was asking me to do, but I did it anyway.

“And bite.”

I did.

Tick.

I bit through my finger, as easy as taking a bite through a carrot. The cuckoo smiled devilishly.

“Doesn’t that taste delicious?” the bird asked, as blood rushed from my hand and down my arm, staining the white bed sheets a deep cherry red.

“Yes.” I was in a trance. The finger tasted delicious.

Meat.

I chewed, and I chewed, and I chewed. And I swallowed.

Tock.

Delicious.

The cuckoo flew off the clock and sat at the edge of the cold metal bedframe.

“It’s a tasty snack, isn’t it? Wouldn’t you like more?” the small bird asked slowly, with a pleasant, delicate tone.

I nodded, and slowly took a bite out of my right index finger. I tasted the meat.

It was fresh. Delicious. Red.

I did the same with all 8 of my other fingers, slowly removing the base with my teeth, and then eating the rest, except for the finger nail. I began to quite enjoy the taste. It was a nice mixture of fresh, raw meat that was firm yet chewy, with moisture to wash it down. But I was still hungry. I could still feel the acid of my stomach eating away at the lining of my insides, tearing my stomach tissue from the inner wall of my internal organs. I needed more.

I sat in my bed as I watched the blood stream from where my fingers used to be. Faster and faster, the beautiful dark red stream flowed onto the white sheets of the bed, creating a rather interesting pattern on the linen. My vision was beginning to become blurry.

I looked at the bird.

“I’m still quite hungry,” I said calmly, the tone in my voice monotonous, almost mechanical.

“Try your arm.” The bird laughed. “There’s quite a lot of muscle there to keep you satisfied.”

I looked at my pale arm and felt my stomach growl.

Tick.

I began to bite and tear through the skin.

I had gotten through my right forearm by the time my bed had been flooded with my own blood. Pictures and intricate patterns began to appear in the dark fluid on the bed. My vision was slowly growing darker and darker.

I looked at the bird, and the bird looked at me.

“How do you feel?” asked the little blue cuckoo. “Are you still feeling hungry?”

“No.” I replied, somewhat smiling, with my eyes half closed in a lull. I could feel myself losing consciousness. “I feel good.”

“Good,” the bird said calmly, and he turned and flew back to the base of the little wooden cuckoo house on the clock.

My vision was slowly growing darker and darker, yet I could still feel the blood rushing from my right arm, and from the tips of my hands where my flesh was torn away from the bone. I began to laugh hysterically. I was covered in a pool of my own warm blood. It felt good.

It was comforting, and I was laughing.

Laughing.

Laughing.

Laughing.

As I felt myself slipping from consciousness, I looked to the old mahogany clock on the wall.

But I didn’t see the little cuckoo bird.

The last thing I saw was the minute hand tick slightly to the right, lining up almost vertically with the face of the clock.

12:01.