

The Clock Stood Still

Lizzie looked at the stately old grandfather clock with a mixture of surprise and annoyance. Never before had she seen it motionless, unless Henry was standing in front of it “doing the winding”. And now with its long, ornate pendulum caught in a bizarre half-swing position, pointing left, it looked so strange. Lizzie giggled into her hand. To her it looked as though the venerable old clock had said “tick” and then forgotten the second part of the sentence, just as she, Lizzie, did so frequently of late.

Perhaps Henry had forgotten to wind the clock this week. If so, it was not like him. Perhaps he also was getting forgetful, because he was very particular where that clock was concerned. It had been his father’s and he held it in great reverence. Henry had a very specific routine when it came to winding the clock. Every Sunday evening, he would perform the winding ceremony, slowly, irritatingly slowly, just as his father had done all his life, before he willed the clock to Henry.

And Henry, perpetuated the ritual of the clock winding. He would retrieve the key from the top of the clock casing, carefully opening the glass door front, stopping the pendulum, moving the hands onwards for two minutes, one minute for the amount of time the clock lost every week and one minute for the actual winding process. Henry would then pull up the heavy weights, slowly and methodically, restart the clock then relock the door and reverently replace the key on top of the handsome clockcase..

Lizzie peered at the clock’s ancient mechanism, safely housed behind its pristine glass door. She was, she smiled ruefully, permitted the daily honour of dusting the outside of the clock, but only if executed with due reverence. She extended her hand to open the case, but then ... hesitated and thought better of it. Henry didn’t like anyone to touch ‘his’ clock.. Many’s the argument Lizzie and Henry had had when their boys were small and had played rough games near the clock, or had wanted to help with the winding. They had been told sternly by Henry that, when the clock was their’s they

could wind it, but till then, no-one was to touch it. Strange really, Lizzie mused, Henry had been the most genial, accommodating parent in all respects, except where his beloved clock was concerned.

Lizzie decided she would go immediately and tell Henry that the clock had stopped. She thought perhaps she might use a bit of gentle chiding about memory lapse, just as he was always doing with her. To be able to get her own back would be fun and unusual these days.

Actually, Lizzie thought, this whole morning was unusual. First the clock not working and then, Henry not being downstairs first. It wasn't like Henry to not be up when she was. A tingle of alarm sliced coldly through her. She hoped there was nothing wrong with Henry, after all, he was getting on a bit. How old was he? 87 last birthday, two years older than Lizzie herself. She decided she would go quickly and check on him and spurred on by a frisson of fear, Lizzie shot up the stairs, faster than she had moved in years. She was grateful that this day was one when her arthritis was not troubling her.

Lizzie stood over the gently snoring Henry. Sensing her presence like a soft breeze, Henry, half woke, opened his eyes briefly smiled at her, and mumbled something about soft hands, then he closed his eyes and continued his rhythmic snoring.

Relieved at finding Henry sleeping contentedly, Lizzie looked down at her hands. Yes, they were soft and quite unlined really. She looked with pride at her nails which were well manicured, and her skin which was soft and unblemished. "Hummmh, she thought "not bad considering all the washing and cleaning they have had to do all these years., Even the crippling arthritis hadn't deformed them. And today they were remarkably pain free; this indeed was going to be a good day.

Glancing once more at the peacefully sleeping Henry, Lizzie smiled to herself, it was understandable if he needed to sleep late this morning. She had not felt well the previous evening and Henry had insisted that they both have a generous shot of whiskey, "for medicinal purposes" he had chuckled as they chinked their glasses.

Actually, Lizzie thought she could still feel the effects of that whisky. A sort of light-headed happy, floaty feeling. She quite liked it. She decided she would accept whisky next time Henry offered it, which would surprise him because she had never been much of a drinker, and had always been rather disdainful of Henry's occasional "snifters."

Perhaps she would make breakfast for Henry. He had made her breakfasts often enough. Indeed, he always seemed to be doing things for her lately, Lizzie pursed her lips, was she getting lazy? But then she did have such terrible arthritic pain, and just lately chest pains as well, but she thought delightedly, today she was completely free of pain. Up until now anyway.

She wondered what the time was. That stopped clock was a nuisance. When had it stopped? she wondered. She looked at it again. Two thirty five. Well it must be well past that now.

She drifted over to the window and peered out.. It was still dark outside. She couldn't see the garden properly, but as she peered harder, she saw there seemed to be people in the garden, lots of people and one of them had a bright light, like the ones used on a film set, she thought.

Intrigued, Lizzie went to investigate. She didn't query the fact that she drifted straight through the back door, nor the fact that her smiling parents were both waiting for her, arms outstretched at the edge of the light. She just went to them joyously.

And the Grandfather clock in the hall resumed its ticking progress, recording time as accurately as it always had.

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