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### Waltz of the Clockwork

When she had attained the finale of her twirling and dancing for her distant audience, she was allowed a brusque moment to peek down at the antiquated town. She could watch the disheveled children chasing the livestock, the deceptive merchants selling their obsolete wares, the wandering women searching for deals to occupy themselves until the early evening, and the exhausted men carrying their newly picked harvests to provide for the rest of the homely town. And she, gracefully spinning on her small extended stand of the clock tower, swayed to the toll of the bell, abruptly finding herself dragged into darkness upon its finale strike. Her wooden figure bent eerily according to each phase of her dance, which no longer varied according to the time of day as she had practiced and memorized long beforehand. Rather, her ballet procedure blossomed entirely from her desire to monitor the daily lives of the engrossed markets below.

She was granted a single opportunity to gander at the civilization each and every hour, but her time was forever restricted by the bell's song. She had learned to make the most of each second, designing her dance in such a manner that at the end of each progression, her curious eyes would come to rest upon the straw-thatched roofs and cobbled streets. She could spend more time absorbing the scenery and environment at noon and midnight, opposed to the limited moments that occurred at one or two o'clock. Regardless, her vision still attended every detail, as her short routine at the earliest hours still enabled her to absorb the entire image by twisting her head left to the right as her torso spun violently to compensate for her head's lack of involvement. At twelve she gradually made her way around her elevated platform, digesting a portion of the landscape with each bend, crafting a mental picture of the town she envied. After

the bell concluded its melody, her platform emitted a dreadful clicking sound as the doors to the clock burst open and her platform receded into the darkness and the void.

Her most exciting moments were naturally associated with her freedom outside of the black vacuum. Even when she found herself surrounded by the emptiness of the enclosed den she found comfort in pondering occurrences such as the change of seasons, the complex games of the children, and the chaotic, but somehow methodological, order in the marketplace. In the dark cavity she wound herself up again, having little else to do besides spin the clockwork key upon her back to rejuvenate her gears for precise gestures during her next sojourn into the light. The clockwork key had to be adjusted moments before her performance, lest her delayed reactions limit her time spent monitoring the town's situation. The winding of the key only provided minutes of mechanical life, but thankfully it provided her with a mindless chore to complete during her downtime behind the closed doors. The sound of the clock tower's bell had become a complimentary orchestra. It's ringing instructed her when to stand out in front of her 'loving' audience, the same guests who toiled in the streets without knowledge of her presence high in the tower.

The bell seemed to sing a different tune depending on the time of day and seasonal weather, almost as if it was pleading with her to undergo a different dance opposed to exhausting her potential by cutting her routine to focus on the sights beyond, the images she was not admitted to experience. Its final toll reminded her to take a bow, lower her head sadly downwards, and brace herself for the merciless void that would quickly consume her vision. The doors always seemed to slam shut before her eyes were finished taking mental photographs of the illuminating moon or the vibrant sun. The occasional howling wind or chirping bird served as a subtle reminder of her detention in the darkness and the degrading reality that her purpose

should never extend beyond the ringing of bells and the churning of gears behind the walls. She existed to accent the time of day, even if no one seemed to notice or care. She never knew precisely how her prison was structured, as she never thought to take her gaze away from the light before the doors reinforced the reality that her dreams were mere delusions. However, she did discover it smelled of growth and mold, rotting wood, and corroded rust. Sometimes insects announced their presence as they scurried by her side, but none of them ever returned to visit her once they departed into the darkness.

So she reluctantly followed her scheduled routine, dancing loyally for an uninterested audience, all the while dreaming for a freedom that eventually would be granted to the forgotten dancer. Such liberty manifested itself in the form of a hawk, one who understood the clock's song enough to decide that the den contained within would be a suitable location for a home. It sought to create a nest within the void, a safe haven from the unyielding wind, rain, and occasional snow flurry. The hawk wedged sticks and plants in between the doors until even they could not muster the force to close at the end of the bell's tune. She was left alone on the stage that would remain forever outwards, extended to the beauty, clarity, and freedom. The bird entered its den, transforming her prison into a luxurious nest, and leaving her to happily watch the vibrant life below without worry of the blaring bell, the retracting platform, or the slamming doors. She watched the mischievous children mingle, the procrastinating men converse about rumors and hardships, and the impatient women relax in the center of the marketplace while they awaited the town's next fresh supply of produce. She could see the mountains, the sky, the birds, and the roofs of the multitude of homes, but above all, it was no longer an unreachable spectacle.

She finally noticed the miniscule details that she often missed during her sessions of limited vision, such as the straw bundles resting by the church which now began to ring its own

bells to signal the approaching service for a deceased member of the society. The people flocked towards the church, and only at this moment did she realize that they all wore similar solemn black garments. And she, moved with emotion and pity for their respect and dedication, yearned to escape her platform and accompany them in their ritual. However, an unseen force prevented her from activating her limbs before she could step forward towards the horizon and off the stage that used to serve as her cage overlooking the free world. Several minutes had past since she had last wound her key, and even though she desperately attempted to grasp and spin it, her entire being froze with her torso straightened, her head gazing at the church's bell, and her hands clutching the metal handles upon her wooden back. She was allowed half a second to glance out at the busy town. Then on the final strike of the church's bell, her head fell downward, her body became still upon the middle of the platform, and the clockwork ballerina bowed sorrowfully for the last time before returning forever to the darkness and the void.