

## The Devil's Clock

Eric pushed the door gently, careful to be as quiet as humanly possible. Old people had old houses, old houses had old doors, old doors creaked and groaned. If he wanted to stay out of jail, he had to be cautious. Hell, cranky old-timers like Mr Gregory were just as likely to pull a shotgun out their ass as they were to call the cops. Forget prison - if Eric was too loud, he might well end up in hospital.

Or the morgue.

The thought sent a shiver down his spine.

Being shot sounded terrible, horrifying. But it was better than the alternative.

He closed the front door behind himself, checking that no-one was nearby and able to see him. Being caught was out of the question. This needed to go off without a hitch.

Old people didn't have a lot of cash-money. But they did have relics and antiques from a lifetime lived. Gaudy statues and decorations and valuable little trinkets. Eric didn't need much. He wouldn't take everything. Just enough to pay for rent.

It was dark. Very dark. Almost pitch black. But Eric could see well enough. He'd been out in the dark of night for hours. His eyes had adjusted.

And what he could see was disappointing.

No golden statues. No valuable-looking vases. No paintings.

The living room was barren save for a worn armchair and a TV that looked older than Eric. He looked on shelves and through any draws and cabinets he could find, always careful not to make a single sound.

Nothing.

Fucking nothing.

He checked every room save for the one that the old cheap-ass was sleeping in. The most valuable thing he'd found so far was the medicine in Mr Gregory's bathroom cabinet. Eric had left the stuff where it was. He wasn't about to steal some old man's medicine. He had *some* principles.

Besides, the only people who would buy drugs from him were the type that Eric didn't want to associate himself with. Too much risk in that business for Eric's liking.

So, the bedroom. If there was anything valuable in this house at all, it was in there.

Along with the old man himself.

Risky. Very fucking risky.

But Eric needed the money. And he needed it in the next few hours. He had no choice.

Holding his breath, he placed a hand on the doorknob and turned it.

The door creeped slowly open, little by little.

The room stank. Really fucking stank. It was probably the worst smell Eric had ever come across. Rancid and putrid and stale.

He couldn't help it. He gagged, coughed.

Nothing inside the room stirred. It was silent, smelly. And totally motionless.

As he slowly moved inside, Eric had a sneaking suspicion he knew what that smell was. He put the thought out of his mind, focused on searching the room for valuables.

If the old man had kicked the bucket, he wouldn't be needing any of this shit anyway.

Clothes. Old-ass clothes and not much else.

He checked every draw except one.

The locked one.

Who locked a fucking side table?

Someone who was hiding something valuable inside it.

Eric couldn't bring himself to smile at the thought. Happy as he was that he might actually be able to get some money out of all this, it felt wrong to take from a dead man.

He'd checked. Old man Gregory wasn't breathing.

From the smell, it had been a long while since he stopped breathing.

Picklock, Eric told himself. He didn't have time to mourn a person he barely knew and very much disliked. He got the tiny metal pieces from his pocket, began picking the lock.

Old locks were easy to pick. They'd been made for bulky, heavy keys. There was a lot of room in them for testing, teasing the little parts into the right place.

It took him less than a minute before the lock opened.

Inside the drawer was a book, what looked like a journal. And an old-fashioned pocket watch. Eric couldn't tell what kind of metal it was made from, though he could see the slight shine that it gave off. Polished. And a dark metal. Probably expensive.

He ignored the journal, took the watch and stowed it away in his pocket.

Wordlessly, he apologised to the old man, made his way out of the house.

It was black. A black metal. Like nothing Eric had ever seen before. The clock part was broken. He examined it under the light of a street-lamp. There was only one hand, and it remained still and silent. Silent for this type of a watch felt wrong. There should be a quiet ticking, right? And there was a button on the top, a single button made from the same black metal.

It wasn't a pocket-watch. It was a stopwatch.

Something told Eric that stopwatches were inherently less valuable than pocket watches. Great.

The metal was clean, unblemished. New.

Not old and probably not expensive.

Fuck.

He only had three or so hours until sunrise. The sky was already beginning to turn a dark shade of blue. He didn't have time for this bullshit.

Eric pressed the button, testing to see if the piece of crap even worked.

Surprise surprise, it didn't.

The hand didn't move. Not even slightly.

He clicked it again. And again.

No movement. Fucking fantastic. He'd stolen a broken stopwatch. A master criminal. Greatest heist ever.

He pulled out his smart phone, tapped the screen to check the time.

Nothing happened.

Eric stared at it, speechless.

He tapped it again.

Nothing.

It wasn't working. Just what he fucking needed right now.

He didn't have time for this shit. Not today. Not right now.

The world was silent at night. Eerily so.

Eric had been out at night countless times, walked the empty streets 'til sunrise. Somehow, tonight seemed even more silent than usual. Like nothing in the world was making a sound.

It was weird.

And it got even weirder when he spotted the flying cat.

Or, not flying, but frozen mid-jump. Levitating in the air.

That was... unusual.

Eric walked over to it, bemused. It couldn't be real. It was some kind of joke or prank. It had to be.

But no, it was a real cat. No invisible strings holding it in place. Its eyes were open,

frozen like the rest of its body.

Eric looked around, seeing his surroundings in a new light.

The street lamps. There was something off about them too. They weren't flickering like usual. There was no hum of electricity reverberating from them. They were silent, still.

He picked up an empty can from the side of the road, tossed it into the air. It moved a few inches, slowing in the air until it froze in place, just like the cat.

The world was frozen.

Eric's mind worked fast, the realisation hitting him in just a few moments.

He pulled the black stopwatch from his pocket, stared dumbly at it. The hand hadn't moved. It still pointed directly up. The black metal was cold in his hand, unnaturally so.

He'd pressed it three times earlier. On, off, on.

It couldn't be real. Could it?

His eyes darted to the cat, watching intently. He clicked the stopwatch's button, filling the air with that metallic clink.

The cat landed, jumping in fright as it saw Eric standing there where nothing had been a moment before. It bolted, running into the shadows and out of sight as the sound of a metal can clattered to the floor next to Eric.

He looked down at the stopwatch disbelieving.

If this was real, if he wasn't dreaming or having a mental breakdown right now, he'd just discovered the solution to so many of his problems. All of them.

"It's all there," Eric said, watching as his landlord counted the through the cash.

Regan Dovaski huffed, continued counting.

When he was done, he looked at Eric - almost disappointed that he didn't have the excuse to kick the boy out onto the streets.

"Don't be late again," Regan warned.

Eric nodded, first clenched.

Regan was an asshole, through and through. A fat, middle-aged man who owned several houses in the area, renting them out at extortionate rates and fucking over his tenants at every opportunity. Eric had even heard stories about how Regan would give female tenants a little bit more time to pay their rent if those women gave him sexual favours.

As the man turned to leave, Eric pulled out his stopwatch and froze time.

"You're a prick," he said into the sudden silence. "An asshole. You're scummy and shitty. Fucking dirtbag."

They were the things he'd wanted to say to Regan for so long.

One day, he'd say them to Regan's face. But, for now, this would do just fine.

He clicked the stopwatch button again.

Regan took a step, paused, turned to look at Eric with an ugly smile on his lips.

"Pack your shit," he said, sneering. "I'm kicking you out. Find somewhere else to live."

"What? Why?" Eric spluttered, heart seizing.

Regan smiled. "Why the fuck not? I'm an asshole, get used to it. Or don't, since you don't live here any more."

The fat man laughed, even as Eric brain whirred. His mind catching onto the possibility like a rope.

He clicked the button again, freezing time.

"You don't want to kick Eric out, money is good."

Eric hoped and prayed it would work. Clicked to unfreeze time.

Regan's eyes blurred for an instant, refocused.

"On second thought, you can stay. Next week, you'll be paying double. Got a problem with that, turd?"

Eric wandered through Regan's house, frozen in time and unseen by the building's sole inhabitant. Regan's gold-digging wife, a woman named Rose. She was easily young enough to be Regan's daughter, a sexy piece of ass that fucked the fat man for his money.

Eric supposed Regan probably knew it, was willing to give his cash to a classy whore like Rose rather than a random street-side hooker.

Eric had met Rose a few times. None of which were pleasant.

She was a bitch. As much an asshole as her husband. The only real difference between the two was how attractive Rose was. Slim waist, round ass, big fake tits. She had bleach blonde hair, a fake tan, and the face of a goddess. Attractive on the outside, rotten on the inside.

Eric walked over to her, whispered into her ear.

"You're horny. You want to fuck the next man you see. Cheating on your husband is fun. You'll have sex with the next man you see, no matter who it is."

Some of Eric's money had gone into buying those stupidly big fake tits for Rose, it was only fair he get to play with them.

Plus, it was an opportunity to test how powerful the stopwatch really was. If it had really effected Regan, or if that had all been an unlikely coincidence.

He left the house, unfroze time, went to ring the doorbell.

Rose answered it, looking flushed and hotter than ever.

"Is Regan about?" Eric asked, eyes roaming over Rose's body.

She didn't seem to mind his gaze. If anything, she seemed to enjoy being looked at. "He's not," Rose purred. "Would you like to come in and wait for him? I'm sure I can entertain you until he gets home..."

Rose, it turned out, really fucking good in bed.

She rode Eric hard and fast, using his cock as a glorified dildo as she bounced her way happily to orgasm after orgasm. Eric could do little but lay there, enjoying the sensation of Rose's pussy around his cock, the sight of her on top of him.

He took pictures, little mementos. She smiled into the camera, posed for each shot.

Eric was beginning to see why Regan had married the woman.

Thoughts of Regan made Eric want to fuck her even harder, to screw her as payback. A reward for having to deal with all of Regan's shit over the years.

She squealed when Eric pushed her down onto the bed, climbing on top of her. She moaned when he thrust into her, gasped when he bit her neck and left hickeys on those gravity-defying tits.

And, when it was over, he coated her face in cum and snapped a picture of the sight.

She lay there panting, licking her lips, eyes hungry and satisfied all at once.

Eric leaned against a lamp post, the stopwatch in his hand. He stared at it, at the hand that had moved. Not by much, no more than two or three degrees.

In the palm of his hand, he held more power than all the world's armies combined. He held all the wealth in every bank vault, all he needed to do was take it.

How or why old man Gregory had owned such an item, Eric didn't know. The man was dead and gone.

But the fact that Mr Gregory had been so poor, so grumpy and grouchy and alone, was proof that the old fool hadn't had the balls to use the watch properly.

Eric had no intention of making that same mistake.

With this stopwatch, the world was his for the taking.