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## The Clock

by Richard Lewis

My father stood in the hallway, still as a tin soldier. Well, he was ex-army.

He was gazing at the grandfather clock, passed down by his father, twenty-five years back. The white face of the clock looked down imperiously.

For a moment I thought he was going to salute it but he just turned and said, "I want you to have it John, there won't be room when we move and I'd like it kept in the family."

I was taken aback, thinking, 'that man has tended to the old clock all these years, winding, checking and adjusting, what do I know about clocks?'

I didn't want to take it but knew it was an offer I couldn't refuse and found myself saying, "thanks dad, I'll treasure it."

We bundled it into the back of the estate car but it stuck out the back, so I tied a red cloth to warn other motorists, thinking, 'this'll be a red rag to a bull when my wife Mary sees it.'

On arriving home, the first thing Mary said was, "you know what that is don't you?"

"No, what do you mean?" I replied, feeling a bit queasy.

"That's a white elephant," she said, in superior tones.

Feeling disconsolate, I set it up in the front room but the wretched thing refused to go. It just stood with a sullen air about it, clearly objecting to being moved and taking an instant dislike to its new owners.

I had to call the clock doctor, to have it regulated. Responding to the skilled hands of the horologist, it was soon ticking away happily and chiming on the quarter, half and hour.

All seemed well until bedtime, when Mary said, “hang on, is this thing going to be chiming away all night?”

“Well you can’t just turn it off at night,” I said.

“You know I don’t sleep well at the best of times,” she groaned.

That night Mary woke in a sweat, complaining that she’d dreamt we lived in a belfry and the bell ringers were practicing for Sunday’s service. I called the horologist who said I could insert a peg to stop the chiming.



“Thank god for that,” Mary cheered, in triumph.

Six years later, my father died. Standing in empty silence while he was lowered into the grave, the coffin reminded me of the clock. I had this strange thought, ‘if only it could have been buried with him,’ then even stranger, ‘the empty case could have been used for the coffin.’

It was a crazy notion but then grief can do strange things.

When we arrived home, I was aware of the absence of that continuous ticking I’d become so accustomed to. It seems far-fetched I know but the clock had stopped.

I thought, I must have forgotten to wind it up, but no, I’d become as regimented as my father. I gave it a nudge... but nothing.

Ten years later the clock still stands as quiet as a church mouse, silenced like my father.