

Clockwork

A hum, a spark, a sudden pause.

The clock starts to tick.

The eyes open first, blinking fast against the incoming light. Two hazel marbles, rolling around in their sockets. Hands reach out, tiny fingers gently pressing against the warm soft skin of a mother, who - despite the pain of giving birth and the lack of sleep - starts to smile at her daughter. The baby, in awe of her new life, tries to open her cherry pink mouth to speak. But no words come out. Only the sound of a clock.

A laugh, a flicker, a toothy grin.

The clock keeps on ticking.

Three young boys run around on a huge patch of grass. The afternoon's as hot as a burning furnace, the well-kept roses dropping to their knees, begging for water. The children run through the sprinkler, screaming at the top of their lungs and daring each other to step onto the scorching pavement. Their dad, who is in the middle of a two hour work meeting, yells at them to be quiet. The response is muffled as they trudge into the house, silently greeted by the sound of a clock.

A bell, a commotion, a piece of paper.

The clock keeps on ticking.

A thousand and one pairs of shoes pour into the halls. The teachers have bloodshot eyes and fatigued faces, counting the seconds until they can leave. Students chew their pencils as they scour through the questions, skeptical of the lead-filled dots that start flashing across the page. Every anxious breath echos against the walls, each struggle felt within the hearts of each pupil. They all turn and face the screen, watching the seconds slipping away and trying to ignore the sound of a clock.

A whistle, a rush, a complaint.

The clock keeps on ticking.

The rain lashes down onto the walkway as the train leaves the station. An accountant mumbles disgruntled groans after being late for the third consecutive time. He worries about his job, his family, his girlfriend. The man sits upon an old bench, the tacky green paint peeling off the seat after years of exposure to unruly toddlers. He watches the world pass by as he patiently waits for the next train, forced to listen to the sound of a clock.

A cry, a pain, a solemn day.

The clock keeps on ticking.

The house is quieter than usual. She drops her keys in the ashtray, and creeps towards the mantelpiece. Sitting in the center is a photo of a child and a man, both with freckles

and the same lopsided smile. Bitterly, she hurls it to the floor, wood splintering in different directions. The lady collapses, choking on the tears forming at the back of her throat. Her shoulders buckle under the pressure of heavy thoughts, and she slowly drifts to sleep, slowly rocked by the sound of a clock.

A ring, a smile, a new day.

The clock keeps on ticking.

A phone lights up inside a bedroom shrouded in black. An old man looks up from the bed, his wrinkly fingers lifting to press the answer button. A voice rings out, someone young and joyful. Words are exchanged: a mix between greetings, questions and apologies. The old man's mouth begins to move, his lips cracking as his dimples fly upwards. The man arouses and staggers towards the window. He reaches for the shutters, and pulls up the blinds. The sun washes into the room, clearing the haze that had been there for a decade. He lies there, listening to the noises from the phone: remnants of laughter screaming and the sound of a clock.

A beep, a wave, an ending.

The clock keeps on ticking.

She feels the clock before she hears it. The room is white and isolating, the only comfort coming from the magenta coloured cards that sit on the drawers. The air smells artificially clean, of sanitizer and latex gloves. Outside, she hears a nurse crying. Her

nurse. The lady turns to face the life support machine, the line wearing thin, canceling out the beats. Every nerve has lost its spark, every thought has lost its love. The woman tries to cry, but her eyes are just struggling to stay open. She closes them, and the gears of her clock spin out of control, the hands failing to keep her alive. She falls, departing alongside the sound of a clock.

And at that moment, the clockwork stops. Just for a minute, to look at what it's done. To see the suffering and heartbreak that it had caused, the endless torture. To see the joy and love and smiles.

But it remains emotionless.

The clock must keep ticking.