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After Death's Instant Chimes

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I hear them coming, one then another, making their piercing screams as they run through the night. They howl to the moon and the curious. A pied piper with search-light eyes and a wailing flute for a song. They're getting closer.

"Bong," from a tower -- death's instant chimes.

Trying to look at the tower through the trees, I see the moon and it seems secure as it smiles a close-lipped smile of secrecy. It knows something no one else knows, and it isn't going to tell.

The curious ones are out there now. I can see them, and I see the moon. It knows and it isn't really smiling. They are out there on porches, hiding behind the dirty white pillars. They're peeking on the scene through bent Venetian blinds, wanting to see, not be seen.

Seeking out the vanquished, they move at a slower pace. Now all can see their ghastly narrowing arc of light rolling up the street in the rose of pain. And the siren seems to draw them, saying, "It's near! It's near!"

The children are always first. They come, tripping over the sidewalk separations; they're all yelling and trying so hard. Everything is serious to them as they thump by with tennis shoes and bleached-out jeans. So innocent and free, like lambs in search for the knowledge of the old.

The old are down there now, walking on three legs and limping on two. The howling has stopped, but the rose light seems to catch and hold them like a spell. Their eyes flow down in dim night, glowing only half as bright as cats crying under the porch. The old know, and they go along just the same. Curiosity has made them the hunters, seeking out the blood of one
of their number. They didn't know the flicker of her poor heart had blown out, and they really didn't care.

As I watch them from the window, a crowd gathers in the circle of light. Behind trees and shrubs stand the old, whispering to the sad ears of their friends. The young, grouping in quiet threes and fours, near my fatal house.

"What's that for?" say the young. The red arc hits its widening mark.
"Is someone hurt?" from the shrubs they whimper.
"Who?" behind the trees they whisper.
"Ahh!" they all, children and old, cry out.
Two of them with white...no, red, coats are carrying her out into the wind. They seem to be having trouble with her frail ninety pounds.
"Oh no!" The blanket got caught in the wind. She looks horrible down there, all pink and blue, her face drawn and grotesque. And the eyes, oh, the eyes are bright and sparkling white, then red.
She sees them all with those hypnotic eyes. The eyes seem to draw me through the darkness saying, "And they all came just for me."
She didn't realize, she really didn't know.
She had lived too long.

I feel sick. My stomach feels like someone hit it with a hammer and now I have to heave blood. My face is shriveling into a contorted mask, and my eyes, my eyes ache so...I can't stand it. They are the only way to talk to her. I must talk to her! I must keep them open.

The light grows brighter as it roars. They all sigh as it opens its mouth and swallows her with her eyes, the talking eyes of my agony. There was so much I should have said to them as they scream, silently flashing to the moon.

I sit above, watching the lost sheep. Their
shepherd has departed and they wander off and don't know where to go. The blood-rakers of my soul are aimless monsters.

"I have to tell her, I have to!" Running out of her room, down the stairs. Nothing in the world is real except me. Everything is paper and wood. And I am the devil's flint and steel, God's conscience as a flaming tumble-weed, issuing out purity to all.

The wind carries me, crying as it calls me to its side. I can hear it, I've never been able to before.

"Whoo-oo; whoo, whoo."

There is a little girl chasing me with a daisy in her hand. I don't know how, she has no face at all: it must be the heat. She wants something. She wants to give me that flower. I stop to take it from her, and as I touch her hand she disappears in a smoky ball of suspended charred bits. Like paper floating on a breeze, she had something to say.

"Get out!" The wind is calling.

"Rumble, rumble, rumble."

"Tick, tick; tick, tick." says the wind, rumbling down the track. The flashing signals hurt my eyes as I run. The wind song of my sad soul, screaming down the track.

I run, trying to grab the boxcar handle as it races with me down the rails. There, I've got it. It drags me along the cinder evil earth. I have to pull myself in or I'll lose her, and I have to tell her.

"Tick, tick; tick, tick."

My feet are bloody, but I'm in. Everything is quiet now. All they want to do is kill and then go to watch the dying. But I'm gone and I'm glad and they can do whatever they want.

This whole thing is full of beautiful wooden boxes and me. They're all varnished and carved with
flowers and crosses. They're all empty except for one, the one that carries my now motherless eyes.

"Dead!"

"Tick, tick; tick, tick," say the train and track.

"Tick, tick; tick, tick," I sing as I laugh. The unseen eyes from the wood box with brass handles cry.

It is so strange in here, everything seems somehow turned around. Outside the telephone poles sing the angel spirit's song on earth, melodious lapping on the tick-train tracks. I am real and the world is good. The song is constant and beautiful. People tick and forget they're clocks. I'm quite sleepy.

"Tick, tick," to sleep I rock.

I am up and high and floating fast. UP. UP. Dreams, oh dreams, dreams are down. No dreams, please! Up to sponge rubber clouds and more, I think the no-thought, overlapping thoughts with angels. The wind sings a pretty song of a land I once knew. No dreams please! I see the trees, green trees, bloodless trees that do have roots. They dig into sidewalks and time. Dig into my soul with salty raindrops, piercing as they fall. There is a secret bird in the trees of my soul. It flies in and out of the limbs somehow missing all the raindrops. It is a perfect, beautiful thing as it carries me up. I am with the rainbow. I can touch it, it is real and I am serene. I walk on it with crusty boots. Blue, green, soft yellow-white, nice, not bright. In the embryo soft of night, I am warm, and living life, not watching it. I fly to the shock of birth with a clear-rain umbrella to see through when I land.

"Click," says the umbrella.
"Tick, tick," says the cycle train clock. I wave good-bye to the strange bird as it flutters back to the green-tree sun in its crumpled limbo of flight. It tips its wings and is gone.

My eyes open and as I wipe the crest away the world, like my flight, is beautiful. I am at peace with myself. I look out and there is my shimmering umbrella dissolving from the lifescape as it races with me. It was so peaceful and good.

"I can't let it go!"

Jumping back to the placid pool, the waves mount and the swell carries me. I am with the rainbow once more. Crashing comes the black cinder shore. I can hear it tick as the train goes speeding back. In my hand is a daisy, a blackhearted ball of sun. It cries purity to my eyes.

I can hear them. I can see them now, in the soft moon-sun. The eyes like cats are flowing down. They are coming for me.

A distant tower chimes two times.