

The Clock Store

Every time Halloween night rolled around the corner, right when the moon rose and after the wind carried the smell of wilted leaves, the old clockmaker on Hollow Street lit a single lantern in his shop window. No one ever saw him enter or leave his shop. No one even remembered when he had arrived in this town.

But everyone knew the single rule: Never go inside the shop when the lantern is lit. Of course, rules exist so someone can break them, and this year, young Mira, curious and stubborn, heard rumors of the magical clocks the old man built. Those clocks didn't just tell time... but *controlled* time. Those clocks whispered when no one was listening and people sometimes went to the store to buy them; though never returned.

When she approached the shop, the lantern flickered, and the door creaked open without her touching it. Inside, the shop was packed wall-to-wall with clocks - tall, small, silver, wooden, glowing faintly or ticking with heart-like rhythms. Some ticked forward, some backward, and some didn't tick at all.

Behind the counter stood the clockmaker. But he was not exactly a man. His eyes were ticking dials, shifting every time he blinked. His spine bent like the hinge of a grandfather clock. And when he spoke, it sounded like gears grinding aggressively.

"Welcome, Mira," he said even though she'd never given him her name. "I've been expecting you."

She froze and frantically reached for her phone. "Why?"

He smiled, and every clock ticked once in unison. *CRACK*.

"Because," he whispered, "you're late."

“Late for what?” she asked.

“To choose.” He gestured, and one clock floated toward her—black metal, carved with swirling symbols. It had no hands. Just a single keyhole in the center.

“Turn the key, and it will show you a moment you wish to relive. A memory you can return to... or rewrite.”

Then another clock floated beside it—this one pale blue, glowing with a soft internal light.

“Or choose this one. It gives you one glance into your future. Only one. But what is revealed can never be forgotten.”

Mira swallowed. “And if I choose neither?”

The clockmaker’s smile sharpened. “Then *time* will choose for you.”

Outside, the wind howled. The lantern guttered. Every clock in the shop began ticking faster... faster... a swirling storm of moments, possibilities, destinies.

Mira reached for one clock—then stopped. A thought slid into her mind: *When did she step inside? Had she been here for minutes... or years? Had she already chosen another version of time?*

Behind her, the door slammed shut. She whipped around to see that the man had locked the door shut.

“Now you must choose one of the clocks. You have until I count down to zero!
5...4...3...2...1...”

Mira grabbed a clock and everything went dark. The next morning, Hollow Street was quiet and the lantern was no longer lit. A new clock sat in the shop window—blue pale

glass or black carved metal, depending on who passed by. If you pressed your ear to the clock, you'd hear a faint whisper: "Choose wisely.."

No one ever saw Mira again, but on Halloween nights, there are whispers that her voice can be heard tick-tick-ticking from inside the clockmaker's shop.