

1

I held a secret in my hand, a hidden lie to bruise my heart

I hid it in the dark of deep, left it to rot in the shadows

I sewed my mouth and clapped my hand

over my trembling lips

But still the monster in my gut, it twists and twists and twists

2

Ticky Tocky

Hee-hee-hee!

The Clock on the Wall is Mocking Me.

I cover my ears and shut my eyes.

But the seconds slide just right on by.

Oh Bad Clocky

Stop, stop, stop!

[Back back back, *Stop stop stop.*]

Days and hours slip to weeks.

Decades pass in winky winks.

Oh Great Clocky, Do Not Mock Me, Please Have Mercy, Ring Ring Ring

Hee-hee-hee!!

Ring-ring-ring!!

It Laughs it Laughs! It's Mocking Me!

Ah no, Clocky. I'm Not Ready, I'm not ready for the Wrinkly Wrinks.

The Jobby Job, Creaky Crack, Wamp-Kachings

Now is the time for the Could've Beens and the march of the ants of the Can't Be Nots.

Shall we have a cry at the Never Wills, the It's Too Lates, the Can't Be Nows.

Oh My Clocky, I will Hug Thee, No More Backsies, It's Okay.

Oh My Clocky, Don't Forgive Me, I've been silly, I've been a clown.

If If Only, Perhaps Then Maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe

All we grasped at now has passed us.

Nothing in our empty hands.

Clocky, Clocky, Clocky, Clocky...

Ticky Tocky

Ring-ring-ring.

3

“A creature!” she said!

[“A *creature*?” they whispered.]

“A creature!” she shouted. Her fists pound the table. “I fell into the lair of a *Hideous Creature*!”

Lips trembling, face white, elbows splayed out. Furtively, she glanced about.

She leaned forward and whispered, so quiet, a name.

[“*What, what? Can you say that again?*”]

The bard tried to speak, but she squeaked like a mouse.

She swallowed, mouth dry, and once again looked about.

“No, no— I do not dare. For all I know, It might even now Hear.”

[They murmured as one and shared a look with each other.]

[“*Well, what was it like?*” the innkeeper muttered.]

The bard cleared her throat and coughed a few times.

[They poured out a drink and handed her a pint.]

“A creature...,” she whispered, “with a stomach so deep, with a gullet so wide it could swallow a sheep.”

[“A *snake*?” they whispered. “A *very large snake*?”]

“No,” said the bard, “Not quite a snake.”

[She finished the pint, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and with an incredulous grin, the innkeeper's daughter topped it off.]

"A creature with a face of smoke, with a mouth that twists and Ever Trembles with *Hunger!*

[They inhaled as one and leaned closer toward her.]

["A *wolf?*" they asked, "A *big White Wolf?*"]

"No," said the bard, "Not quite like a wolf."

Her dry lips parted, and she shook as she spoke.

In the dim firelight her eyes seemed to grow.

"A creature with a thirst so strong, a Thousand Seas could hardly quench it for long!

"All the barrels of wine in the cellar of the King, make naught but a meagerly drop for the Thing."

[She finished the pint, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and with a faltering grin, the innkeeper's daughter topped it off.]

"A creature," she said, "that would suck you dry."

"Tongueless and soulless, it steals the Night."

"It drinks your guts and leaves your skin, to crawl inside and play-pretend."

"Singsong, ding-a-long! Now a skipping little girl with an auburn braid long."

"Come next mealtime and drink again, now it's a Wife or a Ma or a Nan."

["*Ah...*," they whispered, "*Like a blood-sucking spider?*"]

"Not quite," said the bard, "Not quite a spider."

["*Emperor of Bats, King of Vampires?*"]

“Not quite a Vampire, for it hungers for flesh.”

[She finished the pint, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and they topped it off.]

[She downed it again, and with a wavering grin, the innkeeper’s daughter topped it off.]

[“*Now tell us, Bard, no tricks, no lies. What was it that you really saw that time?*”]

He put a silver coin, heads up, on the table beside her...

“Well, as I said, it was no spider.”

“It’s a creature with a silent voice.”

[“*A ghost, a ghost?*”]

“Not quite, not quite.”

“A creature with legs like the wind!”

[“*A hare, a fox?*”]

“Not quite, not quite.”

[“*A Kraken!*”]

“No.”

[“*A Gorgon!*”]

“No!”

“One of its faces looks like a crone!”

[“*The Baba Yaga, Baba Yaga!*”]

“Baba Yaga? *No, no, no...*”

Now, the bard’s eyes began to gleam.

The shadow in her dimple darkened with glee.

“My friends, I would call it by name, you see...”

“But it is in the room with us as we speak.”

A wooden spoon clattered loudly to the floor, and everyone was quiet.

“Catching it may prove a difficult thing, for it takes on the shape of what it Eats.”

“By Tomorrow, it might be *he* or *she*.”

“Who knows, who knows, it might even be me.”

“It has a Name, a human name.”

“It does not answer to this given name.”

“But if you want to know, I’ll tell.”

[*She leaned forward, and they did as well.*]

She whispered, “*Its Name Is...*”