

In the Middle off the Night
By Julia Hoch

I

She rose
to stop the clocks
one by one.

The ticking
And the tocking
Had been too much.

Slowly the house grew
Quieter.

Finally time
Stopped.

She perched on the
Windowsill
Knees pulled to her chest.

She remembered other times,
Earlier times,
Another windowsill.

Leaving time all together
Returning to it only when the fun was done or
Supper was ready.

At the thought of supper
Tomorrow's demands threatened to
Come in.

But she held them off
By looking at the moon.

At last she crawled
Into an empty bed that felt too big
In a house that felt too quiet.

And then the clocks re-started
All at once.

II.

I feel her rise
But feign sleep
Preserving her nightly ritual.

The house grows quieter
As the clocks tick off
And she breathes easily once more.
I watched one night
Now know by ear
The following procedure:
The bedroom door re-opens
Three steps toward the bed
A gaze, a sigh,
And then a turn.
To the windowsill
She climbs
Draws knees to chest
Eyes to the moon.

This time is hers alone.

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Once I rose to hold her
She pleaded “not too tight”
So now I let her dream alone
And I “sleep” quietly by

I know my time is ending
That her anxiety ever multiplies
Soon my love will push me away
For fear that from her I will fly

Men, she says, have hurt her
And so I’m called “my boy.”
I swear to never become one
To always be “her joy.”

And so I play the fool.
My mischief—my beguile
I love to make her laugh
Still more to see her smile.

“Today or tomorrow”
I hear her say
An arrow through my heart.

Tomorrow's tomorrow
I silently pray
As all the clocks re-start.

III.

I wake to watch her sleeping
To see a dream in
The moonlight.

A time I thought
I would not have
A dream
that passed me by.

And as with other dreams achieved
There was both work and pain.
And as with other times received
Beginnings came with ends.

But those ends were
Quickly coming,
And that work and pain
I fast forgot.
When I saw her first smile
When I heard that first laugh.

I gaze at her.
My child.

Our child.

His child.
My breath catches.

I hold his watch within my hand
The tocking all I have.
I hear his steady beat
It heals and breaks my heart.

My boy, My boy
Off to war
One bullet took him down

My boy, my joy
I pushed away
Not trusting he was mine.

This child that he will not know
The timing so precise
He died the day
I felt her kick--
A trade of one for one.

I could fill my days with sighs
For the things time took from me
But then she snores.
Oh what I'd miss!
While stuck remembering.

So I place the watch on
Our smaller, just-right bed.
She'll feel her father's heartbeat
Steady ticking by her chest.
She will not grow to fear time
Or need to run away.
For time will be her father's love
And mother's open arms.