

BEYOND THE DOOR

by

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Scene 1

That night at the dinner table he brought it out and set it down beside her plate. Doris stared at it, her hand to her mouth. "

DORIS
My God, what is it?

DORIS
Well, open it.

Doris tore the ribbon and paper from the square package with her sharp nails, her bosom rising and falling.

Scene 2

Larry stood watching her as she lifted the lid. He lit a cigarette and leaned against the wall.

DORIS
A cuckoo clock!

MY MOTHER
A real old cuckoo clock like my mother had.

HER EYES
Just like my mother had, when Pete was still alive.

LARRY
It's made in Germany.

LARRY
Carl got it for me wholesale. He knows some guy in the clock business. Otherwise I wouldn't have-

He stopped.

Doris made a funny little sound.

"CARL
I mean, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to afford it.

"CARL
What's the matter with you? You've got your clock, haven't you? Isn't that what you want?

Doris sat holding onto the clock, her fingers pressed against the brown wood.

LARRY
Well.

LARRY
what's the matter?

He watched in amazement as she leaped up and ran from the room, still clutching the clock.

Scene 3

He shook his head. "

LARRY
Never satisfied. They're all
that way. Never get enough.

He sat down at the table and finished his meal.

The cuckoo clock was not very large. It was hand-made, however, and there were countless frets on it, little indentations and ornaments scored in the soft wood. Doris sat on the bed drying her eyes and winding the clock. She set the hands by her wristwatch.

Scene 4

Presently she carefully moved the hands to two minutes of ten.

Scene 5

She carried the clock over to the dresser and propped it up.

Scene 6

Then she sat waiting, her hands twisted together in her lap-waiting for the cuckoo to come out, for the hour to strike.

Scene 7

As she sat she thought about Larry and what he had said.

Scene 8

And what she had said, too, for that matter-not that she could be blamed for any of it. After all, she couldn't keep listening to him forever without defending herself; you had to blow your own trumpet in the world.

She touched her handkerchief to her eyes suddenly. Why did he have to say that, about getting it wholesale? Why did he have to spoil it all? If he felt that way he needn't have got it in the first place. She clenched her fists. He was so mean, so damn mean.

But she was glad of the little clock sitting there ticking to itself, with its funny grilled edges and the door.

Scene 9

Inside the door was the cuckoo, waiting to come out. Was he listening, his head cocked on one side, listening to hear the clock strike so that he would know to come out?

Scene 10

Did he sleep between hours?

Scene 11

Well, she would soon see him: she could ask him. And she would show the clock to Bob.

Scene 12

He would love it; Bob loved old things, even old stamps and buttons. He liked to go with her to the stores.

Scene 13

Of course, it was a little awkward, but Larry had been staying at the office so much, and that helped.

Scene 14

If only Larry didn't call up sometimes to-

There was a whirr. The clock shuddered and all at once the door opened. The cuckoo came out, sliding swiftly. He paused and looked around solemnly, scrutinizing her, the room, the furniture.

It was the first time he had seen her, she realized, smiling to herself in pleasure.

Scene 15

She stood up, coming toward him shyly. "

DORIS

Go on.

DORIS

I'm waiting.

The cuckoo opened his bill. He whirred and chirped, quickly, rhythmically. Then, after a moment of contemplation, he retired.

Scene 16

And the door snapped shut.

She was delighted. She clapped her hands and spun in a little circle. He was marvelous, perfect! And the way he had looked around, studying her, sizing her up. He liked her; she was certain of it. And she, of course, loved him at once, completely.

Scene 17

He was just what she had hoped would come out of the little door.

Doris went to the clock. She bent over the little door, her lips close to the wood. "

DORIS
Do you hear me?

DORIS
I think you're the most
wonderful cuckoo in the world.

DORIS
I hope you'll like it here.

Then she went downstairs again, slowly, her head high.

Larry and the cuckoo clock really never got along well from the start. Doris said it was because he didn't wind it right, and it didn't like being only half-wound all the time. Larry turned the job of winding over to her; the cuckoo came out every quarter hour and ran the spring down without remorse, and someone had to be ever after it, winding it up again.

Scene 18

Doris did her best, but she forgot a good deal of the time. Then Larry would throw his newspaper down with an elaborate weary motion and stand up. He would go into the dining-room where the clock was mounted on the wall over the fireplace. He would take the clock down and making sure that he had his thumb over the little door, he would wind it up.

DORIS
Why do you put your thumb over
the door?

UNKNOWN
You're supposed to.

She raised an eyebrow. "

UNKNOWN
Are you sure? I wonder if it
isn't that you don't want him to
come out while you're standing
so close.

UNKNOWN
Why not?

DORIS
Maybe you're afraid of him.

Larry laughed. He put the clock back on the wall and

gingerly removed his thumb. When Doris wasn't looking he examined his thumb.

There was still a trace of the nick cut out of the soft part of it. Who-or what-had pecked at him?

One Saturday morning, when Larry was down at the office working over some important special accounts, Bob Chambers came to the front porch and rang the bell.

Scene 19

Doris was taking a quick shower. She dried herself and slipped into her robe.

Scene 20

When she opened the door Bob stepped inside, grinning.

BOB CHAMBERS

Hi.

BOB CHAMBERS

It's all right. Larry's at the office.

BOB

Fine.

BOB

How nice you look today.

She laughed.

BOB

Be careful! Maybe I shouldn't let you in after all.

They looked at one another, half amused half frightened.

PRESENTLY BOB

If you want, I'll-

DORIS

No, for God's sake.

DORIS

Just get out of the doorway so I can close it. Mrs. Peters across the street, you know.

She closed the door. "

DORIS

And I want to show you something.

DORIS

You haven't seen it.

He was interested. "

DORIS
An antique? Or what?

She took his arm, leading him toward the dining-room.

DORIS
You'll love it, Bobby.

DORIS
I hope you will. You must; you must love it. It means so much to me-he means so much.

BOB
He?

BOB
Who is he?

MOMENT
You're jealous! Come on.

MOMENT
He'll come out in a few minutes. Wait until you see him. I know you two will get along just fine.

UNKNOWN
What does Larry think of him?

UNKNOWN
They don't like each other. Sometimes when Larry's here he won't come out. Larry gets mad if he doesn't come out on time. He says-

MOMENT
Says what?

Doris looked down. "

Doris
He always says he's been robbed, even if he did get it wholesale.

Doris
But I know he won't come out because he doesn't like Larry. When I'm here alone he comes right out for me, every fifteen minutes, even though he really only has to come out on the hour.

She gazed up at the clock.

Doris
 He comes out for me because he
 wants to. We talk; I tell him
 things. Of course, I'd like to
 have him upstairs in my room,
 but it wouldn't be right.

There was the sound of footsteps on the front porch.

Scene 21

They looked at each other, horrified.

Larry pushed the front door open, grunting. He set his
 briefcase down and took off his hat. Then he saw Bob for the
 first time.

HIS EYES
 Chambers. I'll be damned.

LARRY
 What are you doing here?

Doris drew her robe about her helplessly, backing away.

BOB
 I-

LARRY
 That is, we-

Suddenly the clock began to whirr. The cuckoo came rushing
 out, bursting into sound.

Scene 22

Larry moved toward him.

LARRY
 Shut that din off.

He raised his fist toward the clock. The cuckoo snapped into
 silence and retreated.

Scene 23

The door closed.

LARRY
 That's better.

BOB
 I came over to look at the
 clock.

BOB
 Doris told me that it's a rare
 antique and that-

LARRY
Nuts. I bought it myself.

LARRY
Get out of here.

"

LARRY
You too. And take that damn
clock with you.

He paused, rubbing his chin. "

LARRY
No. Leave the clock here. It's
mine; I bought it and paid for
it.

In the weeks that followed after Doris left, Larry and the
cuckoo clock got along even worse than before.

Scene 24

For one thing, the cuckoo stayed inside most of the time,
sometimes even at twelve o'clock when he should have been
busiest.

Scene 25

And if he did come out at all he usually spoke only once or
twice, never the correct number of times.

Scene 26

And there was a sullen, uncooperative note in his voice, a
jarring sound that made Larry uneasy and a little angry.

But he kept the clock wound, because the house was very still
and quiet and it got on his nerves not to hear someone
running around, talking and dropping things.

Scene 27

And even the whirring of a clock sounded good to him.

But he didn't like the cuckoo at all. And sometimes he spoke
to him.

THE CUCKOO
Listen.

THE CUCKOO
I know you can hear me. I ought
to give you back to the
Germans-back to the Black
Forest.

THE CUCKOO

I wonder what they're doing now,
the two of them. That young
punk with his books and his
antiques. A man shouldn't be
interested in antiques; that's
for women.

He set his jaw. "

THE CUCKOO

Isn't that right?

The clock said nothing. Larry walked up in front of it. "

Scene 28

LARRY

Isn't that right?

"

LARRY

Don't you have anything to say?

He looked at the face of the clock.

Scene 29

It was almost eleven, just a few seconds before the hour.

LARRY

All right. I'll wait until
eleven. Then I want to hear
what you have to say. You've
been pretty quiet the last few
weeks since she left.

He grinned wryly.

LARRY

Maybe you don't like it here
since she's gone.

LARRY

Well, I paid for you, and you're
coming out whether you like it
or not. You hear me?

Eleven o'clock came. Far off, at the end of town, the great
tower clock boomed sleepily to itself.

Scene 30

But the little door remained shut. Nothing moved. The
minute hand passed on and the cuckoo did not stir. He was
someplace inside the clock, beyond the door, silent and
remote.

LARRY
All right, if that's the way you
feel.

LARRY
But it isn't fair. It's your
job to come out. We all have to
do things we don't like.

He went unhappily into the kitchen and opened the great
gleaming refrigerator.

Scene 31

As he poured himself a drink he thought about the clock.

There was no doubt about it-the cuckoo should come out, Doris
or no Doris. He had always liked her, from the very start.
They had got along well, the two of them. Probably he liked
Bob too-probably he had seen enough of Bob to get to know
him.

Scene 32

They would be quite happy together, Bob and Doris and the
cuckoo.

Larry finished his drink. He opened the drawer at the sink
and took out the hammer.

Scene 33

He carried it carefully into the dining-room. The clock was
ticking gently to itself on the wall.

Scene 34

LARRY
Look.

LARRY
You know what I have here? You
know what I'm going to do with
it? I'm going to start on
you-first.

LARRY
Birds of a feather, that's what
you are-the three of you.

The room was silent.

UNKNOWN
Are you coming out? Or do I
have to come in and get you?

The clock whirred a little.

LARRY

I hear you in there. You've got a lot of talking to do, enough for the last three weeks. As I figure it, you owe me-

The door opened. The cuckoo came out fast, straight at him. Larry was looking down, his brow wrinkled in thought. He glanced up, and the cuckoo caught him squarely in the eye.

Down He went, hammer and chair and everything, hitting the floor with a tremendous crash. For a moment the cuckoo paused, its small body poised rigidly. Then it went back inside its house. The door snapped tight-shut after it.

The man lay on the floor, stretched out grotesquely, his head bent over to one side.

Scene 35

Nothing moved or stirred. The room was completely silent, except, of course, for the ticking of the clock.

Scene 36

DORIS

I see.

Bob put his arm around her, steadying her.

BOB

Doctor.

BOB

can I ask you something?

THE DOCTOR

Of course.

THE DOCTOR

Is it very easy to break your neck, falling from so low a chair? It wasn't very far to fall. I wonder if it might not have been an accident. Is there any chance it might have been-

THE DOCTOR

Suicide?

THE DOCTOR

I never heard of anyone committing suicide that way. It was an accident; I'm positive.

BOB

I don't mean suicide.

BOB
I meant something else.

But no one heard him.

THE END