

Third Place

The Attack of the Ticking Cluck

The angry rooster gobbled down Farmer Ben's alarm clock. He sighed and said to himself, "The entire universe is being taken over by modern technology. Soon even robots will be substitutes for us proud chickens."

With that, he hopped out Farmer Ben's bedroom window and took a walk. The clock ticked noisily in the rooster's belly, but he didn't notice it. Just because he didn't notice doesn't mean that others didn't either. Animals stared at him and he raised his neck up high, superior and proud, for he thought he seemed especially attractive and charming that day. However, really, they only stared at him because of the ticking noises that intrigued them and set frowns upon their faces.

The rooster proceeded through the farm and came upon an apple tree. One of its apples fell on his head and, maddened by the thought that someone would want to throw an apple at him, he ate the whole apple, core and all. Inside him, an apple tree grew, bearing apples by the minute, and further down, the clock kept on ticking, ticking, ticking, ticking.

"I'm bored," he complained as he scampered around restlessly, looking for something to do. He stepped on some bumpy stones on the dirt, and looking down at them, discovered they were seeds. The seeds were laid out by Mr. Cook, a chef, looking for prey and hoping to find something good to introduce and cook at the Food, Glorious Food Contest. The Food, Glorious Food Contest, otherwise known as the FGFC, was an annual event when the top chefs from all over the world were invited to compete in introducing and preparing new foods. It was all quite simple; the chef who made the best food was awarded with a blue ribbon and a trip for two to Bermuda, while the chef whose food was the most vile had to eat a rotten egg or two.

The rooster pecked on the seeds and soon a strange feeling fell over him. "Watch your way!" the rooster scolded.

"Why don't you?" cried the Strange Feeling.

The rooster was irritated by the fact that anybody would want to correct him. He was so angry he gobbled down the Strange Feeling and suddenly felt drowsy. He floated in the air and spun around in a circle. Then he hit the hard floor with his legs sticking straight up. His eyes were wide open for a few moments, but gradually closed. Inside him, the apple tree continued to grow and the clock kept ticking ...

When he woke up, he gasped in bewilderment as he looked around the room in which he was lying in the middle of a wide, open space. A black cauldron sat at the side of the room, and it was bubbling ferociously. It all seemed so familiar. Suddenly everything clicked into place. He was in a witch's den, about to be boiled to death as part of a magic love potion. He had seen a movie a while ago with the same scenario.

"What will become of me?" he asked. "Am I only imagin ..." Before he could think any more, a large pair of hands scooped him up, placing him in the dreaded cauldron. When he was supposed to wake up, he was dead as a doornail. The clock kept ticking and the apple tree had stopped growing. All but one of the apples had melted in the unbearably hot process. The strange

feeling remained in the soulless body.

Mr. Cook did his business and soon the dish was both ready and ready to go. Dressed up in his finest clothes he took a cab to the Scrumdiddlyumptious Centre, where the event took place. There was a fancy reception before the actual contest. During that time he prepared the short speech he would give upon winning the event. He was excited like champagne and bubbles.

The contest started; the contestants one by one unveiled their masterpieces. "Oohs" and "Ahhs" were heard all around the room, but the greatest attention was focused on Mr. Cook's dish. Plates were passed as people tasted the edibles. What fascinated them was the chicken's strange yet enjoyable texture, tasting, a tad, of apples, and most of all, having a clock—that was working as if it were brand new—in it.

"Impressive," stated the chair of the food board.

"Absolutely divine," exclaimed the Prime Minister.

"Delicious," cried the president of the world.

"A million dollars is what this man deserves," shrieked a particularly rich woman among the contestants.

Everybody agreed and chipped in, but they only had enough money to make nine hundred and ninety-nine thousand dollars. Mr. Cook, not being used to all this attention, simply said, "Oh, it's okay. I ... uh ... I ... am speechless!" With that, his face turned crimson, and he sat biting his nails.

A week later, Mr. Cook lay back on a beach chair, gazing at the sun. "This is the life," he thought happily. The clock in his pocket ticked noisily as he munched on his apple.

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