

**The Traveler**  
by  
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The night was cold and cruel. Not far from the midnight hour, nor from the edge of a wood, a lone traveler stumbled. The wind hissed among itself, bemoaning the one who had disturbed the solitude of the old mansion. For when the traveler looked up, a mansion was there, gnarled and musty as if it had stood there for centuries, yet the traveler could have sworn it had sprung newly from the soil. Before, they had seen only trees.

The traveler entered, hoping for adventure or perhaps just a place to shelter from searching eyes of wolves. The door opened silent as the night, to a room with naught but drapes, each made of the skin of some unknown, hairless beast. The traveler, feeling now slightly uneasy, for they felt something watching, forged on through the door at the end of the room. For they'd rather feel uneasy than feel the bite of the wind, as strong as any animal of night.

In the next room was a single jar, on a simple rounded table, colored stark as bone. From the jar came voice, singing softly in a tongue not known to man, a song of the universe, of everything and nothing. Enchanted, the traveler drew closer, their fingers nearly touching it, but saw a shadow in the jar, and stepped back, and frantically searched for the door back to the Room of Skins. But it was gone, leaving only a dark, round passage. Deciding that anything was better than the Jar Room, the traveler hurried down it.

How long the traveler spent in the passage-hours, or mere seconds - I do not know. When they emerged, they found themselves in a room filled with nothing but clocks. They were identical - yet each unique. Some ticked for each hour, some for each day, some for each year. But the one in the corner seemed different. It ticked irregularly. This clock, you see, was greedy. It was never content with the time it kept - it stole time, too, bringing about its master, if only for its victim. With each step that the traveler took closer to the clock, they aged. Until finally, their time became just another clock on the wall, their soul just another voice in the jar, their skin another drape on the wall in the Mansion of Death, which we all must pass through.