

## The Birthday Present by Rielle Marie Quejada

I sighed, trudging up the steps to my apartment. Once I unlocked the door, I was surprised to see a large cardboard box on the floor, as if awaiting my return. The idea of a present restored some of my energy, and I hurriedly cut it open.

"A grandfather clock?" I whispered to myself, confusedly. Buried amidst the packing peanuts was a single card. Unfolding it, I read it aloud. "Dear Emilie, in case you couldn't tell who the birthday gift was from, it's me, your uncle! Happy Birthday, by the way! It's been a while since we've seen each other. I'm sure you're thinking 'This is an odd gift,' but don't worry, it gets weirder! The clock is a time machine!"

I paused, looking up from the letter to sigh in exasperation once again. "Want proof? Just take it out of the box and wait until it rings at six o'clock." To rid myself of all doubt, I set up the clock and then checked my watch. Three. Two.

On ---

The instant the clock began to ring, it emitted a blinding light. Surprised, I tripped on the box, causing Styrofoam to fly into the air. "...Where am I?" A woman wearing a long-sleeved blouse and long, burgundy skirt emerged from the light and glanced around frantically.

*She's... beautiful.*

"Pardon me, I was told to come here by a man named Douglas Seeger? He's an acquaintance of mine and I assumed he'd be here."

"Oh! I'm his niece. E-Emilie Seeger." I stammered, stood up to brush myself off, and extended my hand out to her. "It's nice to meet you." She beamed as she shook my hand. "I'm Adelaide Duke, but my friends call me Addy." "Welcome to the year 2019, Addy. While you're here, how about I lend you some clothes so you don't stick out like a sore thumb?" "I'd like that very much." When she finished changing, I took her to the mall to show her how much everything had changed. She stared at everything, including all passerby. Although I'm sure the culture shock was very disorienting, I couldn't help chuckle a little at how every little thing was so fascinating to her.

Once the mall closed, we headed back to the apartment and I reread the note. A postscript? "P.S. By the way, if you decide to use the clock, make it quick! The clock is only usable once a month, so get home by twelve o'clock." Cursing under my breath, I checked my watch. *Eleven thirty!* I rushed to Adelaide and showed her the note.

"You know," She laughed dryly. "Returning home would probably be the right thing to do. But I don't want to go back! If I do, I'll only be forced into a loveless marriage, but here, I'm free."

Her eyes begged me to let her stay, and I relented. Life with Adelaide was fun, but as every month passed, I couldn't help but wonder if I made the right choice.