

TICK-TOCK

Getting a parcel is exciting. Whilst it is exciting to receive a parcel you have been expecting (for example, something you have ordered online - the sort of thing that usually arrives in a neat little cardboard box with a printed address label), it is even more exciting to receive a parcel out of the blue - especially if it is an oddly shaped parcel with your name and address carefully written out in someone else's handwriting.

First, there is the moment when you look at the handwriting on the parcel, trying to guess whose it might be. After that, you might take a few minutes to carefully examine the parcel, trying to see if the shape gives you any clue as to what might be inside. Then, just to prolong your excitement, you might give the parcel a little shake to see if it makes a noise. Then, when you can't bear to wait any longer, there is the wonderful process of ripping off the wrapping paper to reveal the contents of your parcel. That's the best part: finding out that someone has sent you a wonderful and completely unexpected gift.



That's why I was so very excited to receive a parcel in this morning's post. You see, I had not been expecting a parcel, which meant that I was especially excited to have received one. Or at least I was excited until I noticed the handwriting on the parcel. You see, the handwriting was that of none other than Graham Gerbillius, the gerbil who used to live in the box next door to mine. That made me feel rather more agitated than excited. Things only got worse when I looked at the shape of the parcel, which was remarkably familiar to me. My heart sank. I did not even bother to give the parcel a little shake. I knew what was inside. I half-heartedly ripped off the wrapping paper, and my worst fears were confirmed when I saw what was inside. Aargh!!! The ugly clock was back!

I know you must be wondering what kind of clock would be so ugly as to ruin the entire parcel-opening process for me, so, without further ado, here is a picture of the clock in question.



I have to say, dear readers, that the picture does not truly do justice to the clock's ugliness. That is to say, it looks even uglier in reality than it does in the picture.

I suppose that a story is better told from the beginning. Really, by telling you about how I received the parcel containing the clock this morning, I have started at the end - and just to make sure it truly is the end, I want you, my readers, to know that I have taken the clock and put it in pride of place in my bedroom. I have completely and utterly accepted that the clock is mine forever and that no matter how little I like it, I will have to look at it every day. I have decided that it will be a useful reminder of the lesson it has taught me.

Now, to get back to the beginning of the story, it all started when Graham Gerbillius knocked on my door on a cloudy morning about two weeks ago. As soon as I opened the door, Graham reached out his arms towards me and pushed a cardboard box into my hands.





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"Harrison," he said, "I have come to say goodbye to you. I am moving away, and I would like to give you this little token of my esteem."

I was a bit surprised that Graham had brought me a present. You see, although we had been neighbours for quite some time, we were not really friends. I mean, I smiled and greeted Graham Gerbillius almost every day, but that, for my part, was nothing more than good manners; more often than not, Graham Gerbillius did not even bother to smile back at me. The fact is, dear readers, I have never felt the same way about Graham Gerbillius as I do about those I think of as friends, and that is why I had no reason at all to expect him to give me a present.

I accepted the box and said, "Thank you, Graham. How kind of you to give me a present. Would you like to come in for a cup of coffee?"

"I'm sorry, Harrison, but I must dash," replied Graham. "I have lots of packing to do, and you know what that can be like. I have to box up all the stuff I am taking with me, and I am trying to get rid of lots of stuff that I no longer need."

"Well, perhaps another time," I said, smiling politely.

"Perhaps, indeed," said Graham. He then scribbled a note on a piece of paper and handed it to me. "This is my new address. Do stay in touch."

With that, he turned on his heel and headed back home.

I could not wait to see what it was that Graham had given me. After all, it is not every day that someone who is a neighbour but not really a friend just knocks on your door and gives you a present. When I opened the cardboard box and saw what I believe to be the world's ugliest clock for the first time, it all became clear.

Upon close examination, it was obvious to me that the clock was not new. It had been used. I'll show you a picture so that you can see for yourselves, dear readers.



Can you see the rust all over the back of the clock? There you go, then: proof that the clock had been used. Of course, I could guess who had used it. It had to be Graham Gerbillius.

I am sure that you understand how awful the clock made me feel. You only have to imagine how you would feel if someone gave you a present that was used, rusty and ugly. Graham Gerbillius had said that he was giving me a small token of his esteem, but this present was an affront. I could only conclude that Graham Gerbillius held me in very low esteem and had given me the clock because he wanted me to know it. He had said that he was getting rid of stuff that he no longer needed. Obviously, when he came upon his ugly, rusty clock, he decided that rather than just throwing it away, he would use it to insult me. The more I thought about what Graham Gerbillius had done to me, the more upset I felt. I decided that there was only one way to make myself feel better: I had to get rid of the clock.

Graham Gerbillius had used the clock to hurt my feelings, but I thought there might

be a way for me to get rid of the clock and do some good at the same time. Perhaps my local charity shop might be able to sell it and raise some money for a good cause. I put the clock back into its cardboard box and headed out towards the high street.

As soon as I arrived at the charity shop, I walked up to the saleswoman and held out the box.

"This is a donation," I said.



The saleswoman smiled at me and said, "That is very generous of you. Thank you very much."

Looking back on it, I should have left the shop at that point. I would never have had to see the clock again. But knowing what was inside the box, I found myself unable to graciously accept the saleswoman's thanks.

"Um, well, it's not really such a generous donation. You see, the box contains a rather ugly clock, but I thought perhaps you could sell it to raise some money for a good cause. I thought that would be better than just throwing it away."

"Well, let's have a look," said the saleswoman, opening the box. When she saw the clock, she said, "Hmm, I'm sorry, sir, but I don't think we will be able to sell this. You see, our customers are quite discerning, and whilst we do sell second-hand goods, we pride ourselves on the quality of the merchandise we offer."



"I understand," I said. "Do you think you might be able to give the clock to someone in need? I would love it to be used to do some good."

"I know you mean well, sir," said the saleswoman, "but I don't think it would be a good idea to give this clock to someone in need. It is so dreadfully ugly that it might make an already needy person feel sad, and we wouldn't want that." She closed the

cardboard box and thrust it back into my hands.

I could not help but agree with her. After all, the clock had made me feel very upset. I would not want anyone else to feel that way. I took the clock back home.

The next morning, I heard a cry outside my window.

"Rag and bone! Rag and bone!" shouted the rag-and-bone man.

I grabbed the clock in its cardboard box and rushed out into the road, where I could see the rag-and-bone man with his horse and cart.

"I have something for you!" I cried, holding out the cardboard box.

"Whoa! Whoa!" said the rag-and-bone man, and his horse slowed down to a stop.



I held out the cardboard box containing the clock to the rag-and-bone man. He opened the box and glared at me, shouting, "What is it with you gerbils and this ugly clock? Only a few days ago, a gerbil tried to throw this clock into my cart. Are you one of his friends or something? Well, tell him I'm not taking it. I need to make a living out of the stuff I collect, and I am not in the business of collecting rubbish. I could never hope to sell this ugly clock!"



"Firstly," I replied, "I am a hamster, not a gerbil. Secondly, I think the gerbil who tried to throw the clock into your cart was *Graham Gerbillius*, and he is no friend of mine. Thirdly, I only wanted to ask you if you would like to take the clock. I certainly would not have just thrown it into your cart. I am sorry to have bothered you."

"Gerbils! Such time-wasters!" muttered the rag-and-bone man, looking at me and shaking his head. He handed the cardboard box containing the clock back to me and headed on his way. I took the clock back home *again*.

Not only was I stuck with the clock, but the rag-and-bone man had mistaken me for a gerbil. I was determined not to be stuck with the clock for long. Angrily, I removed it from its cardboard box and threw it into my recycling bin (the clock, that is, not the cardboard box).

The next morning I felt rather smug when I dragged out my recycling bin.



I waited at the window for the dustman. I thought that I would feel much better once I saw the dustman empty my recycling bin into his truck. Once he drove away, I would be sure that the clock was finally out of my life.

There was one problem. After the dustman emptied my recycling bin into his truck, I saw him reach into the trash and grab something. Even from my position at the window, I knew what it was. I was certain that the dustman had grabbed the clock. Worse, he was heading towards my box with it.



I rushed out towards the road in a panic. The dustman called out to me, "Mr Hamster! Mr Hamster!"

"Yes," I replied sheepishly.

"I found this clock in your recycling bin. I am sure you put it in there by mistake, so I thought that I should return it to you." He handed me the clock.



"That is very kind of you, but I put that clock into the recycling bin on purpose. I thought that perhaps it could be recycled into something better," I replied with a smile, handing the clock back to him.

The dustman gave me a concerned look. He said, "Um, I'm afraid we can't do that. We can only recycle certain things, you know. Now, paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, aluminium cans: those are fine. Our recycling centre is kitted out to deal with all of them. But a clock..." He trailed off and handed the clock back to me.



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"Well, I don't want to put it into the general rubbish. That would be bad for the environment," I said plaintively.

"Then perhaps you could offer it to the rag-and-bone man," suggested the dustman with a shrug. "The rag-and-bone man can sell almost anything." Then he turned on his heel and headed back towards his truck.

I sat thinking on my sofa, staring at the clock. I was almost at my wits' end when I finally had an idea. I couldn't waste any time. I needed to get to the box where Graham Gerbillius used to live. I hurried out, the clock in my hands.

When I got back home, I felt quite smug. I was finally rid of the clock (or so I thought). You see, I had taken the clock with me to the box where Graham Gerbillius used to live and slipped it through the letter box. It was back where it belonged. More importantly, it was no longer with me. Even better, I had managed to get rid of it without harming the environment. Well, you can see why I felt rather pleased with myself.

A week or so passed, and I had more or less forgotten about the clock when something happened that brought it to the front of my mind again: I saw a moving van drawing up alongside the box next door, which led me to thinking about the box next door, which reminded me of Graham Gerbillius and the clock.

I had just about managed to stop thinking about the clock by the time I met my new neighbour the following day. She was an elderly hamster with a kind face and warm brown eyes, and when I saw her standing on my doorstep, I liked her instantly.

"I've just moved in next door," she said, "and I wanted to introduce myself. My name is Bernice, but my friends call me Bernie." She held out a plate towards me. "Just a few freshly baked cinnamon rolls - I made too many as usual!"



"Harrison," I said, introducing myself and accepting the plate. "Would you like to come in? I have just put the kettle on."

"Lovely to meet you, Harrison, and yes, I would like to come in. My cinnamon rolls do go down a treat with a nice cup of tea!"



We spent such a lovely afternoon together that I started to think of Bernie as a friend. It was as I was thinking about how much I liked Bernie that I started thinking about the clock yet again. How could I have put that ugly clock into my friend's home? Of course, I had done it before she had become my friend - before we had even met, in fact - but that did not make what I had done any less terrible. I was as bad as *Graham Gerbillius*!

I was sitting on my sofa, my head in my hands, wondering how I could ever put things right.



A knock on the door interrupted my thoughts. It was Bernie. She was standing on the doorstep, holding the clock. At first I just stared at her, my mouth hanging open. How had she connected the clock to me?





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Luckily for me, before I managed to ask her, Bernie said, "Harrison, I had meant to ask you about this clock before, but I forgot to bring it round with me earlier. I found it on the doormat when I moved in next door. I think it must belong to the previous tenant of my box. Perhaps it fell out of one of his boxes as he was moving out. By any chance, did he give you his forwarding address?"

I was so relieved that Bernie did not seem to have connected the clock to me that I did something stupid. I fetched the note that Graham Gerbillius had given me and gave it to Bernie.

And now, here we are, dear readers, back at the end of the story. This morning, just four days after Bernie sent the clock back to Graham Gerbillius, here it was, back in my home. When he received Bernie's parcel containing the clock, Graham Gerbillius must have decided that he would get rid of the clock by giving it to me *again*.

I am sure I could have thought of another way to get rid of the clock, but as I opened the parcel from Graham Gerbillius, I felt as if the world was trying to tell me something. It was telling me that I need not have allowed myself to be hurt by Graham Gerbillius and his ugly clock. It was telling me to take it easy. It was telling me to let things go. Most of all, the world was telling me not to waste time on things that don't matter. And that is the moral of this blog post. Time is precious. Spend it wisely. Spend it having fun. Spend it working. Spend it studying. Spend it with your family. Spend it with your friends. Don't ever waste it trying to get rid of an ugly clock!

Just as I write this, I hear something.

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.

It is the ticking of the second hand of the ugly clock. Look at the time! I must sign off. Bernie has invited me over for scones with jam and clotted cream, and I don't want to be late. After all, time is precious, and I want to spend some with my new friend.



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Look at that: the clock is already doing its job and reminding me of the lesson it has taught me. Maybe it was not such a bad gift after all.

Bye for now!

Harrison Hamster I
14th September 2013