

# **The Clock**

## **Amy O'Connor**

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*Killing time...*

Melissa has always treasured the clock her grandmother left her -- until the day she finds herself trapped inside. She isn't the only prisoner, either. Lonely and gorgeous, Jeremy, an empath, has been trapped in grandmother's clock for decades. For the past several years he's grown more aware of Melissa's presence on the other side of the clock -- and slowly fallen in love with her. Now he has one chance to convince her he's real -- and his passion for her is more than just a way to pass the time.

## Chapter One

Melissa ran her fingers over the old wood, absently stroking up and over the whorls of mahogany. It still smelled like beeswax furniture polish, and it warmed immediately under her touch. All her life she'd loved this clock. When her grandmother died, she'd asked if she could have it. Her mom hadn't cared; to her it was just an ugly old mantle clock, a piece of history she didn't want to remember.

Melissa's hand stilled as she noticed the time, her fingers poised over a particularly fascinating pattern that swirled with a life of its own. It was just before midnight.

She laughed, the sound harsh in the otherwise quiet old house. The wood seemed to pulse in time with her heartbeat. If she hadn't know better, she'd have said it was uncomfortably hot right where her fingers hovered. She did know better, however. Her grandmother might have gone to her grave insisting that she -- Melissa -- shared her gift for witchcraft, but Melissa didn't believe in magic. She was an accountant for goodness sake! Facts and figures, neat-and-tidy columns and rows. She believed in real things, in things she could touch. There was no such thing as magic.

*Still...*

She lingered, for some reason reluctant to go upstairs and get ready for bed. Her feet were killing her. The strappy, spike-heeled sandals may have been the perfect accessory for her slinky red evening dress, but she'd have happily had them listed as an illegal instrument of torture.

The first of twelve loud bongs reverberated through the entryway as the hands tripped the hour. The vibration traveled through her hand, crept under her skin, and raced straight toward her heart.

*The witching hour.*

Her grandmother had insisted there was something special about midnight. It was the time when anything was possible. Grinning at her momentary gullibility, she let her hand drop more firmly onto the silky wood. She smoothed her fingers across the intriguing pattern, then rubbed a circle with her thumb. A tiny shiver trembled through her. She shifted from foot to foot, enjoying the way her body reacted to something so beautiful. She may as well have been stroking a lover. She couldn't help it, the clock was... special.

Hah!

She'd apparently absorbed way too many of her grandmother's stories. A clock, special? It was just a clock. The last deep bong resonated under her hand.

A gust of wind rushed through the entry, flinging the front door wide as it passed. She flinched, the instinctive movement making her press down hard on the wooden surface. The wood had slithered away from her uncharacteristically harsh touch. Fierce emotions suddenly roiled through her -- hurt and anguish. Her insides clenched in horror. It was the hurt that was the hardest to bear. She felt as bad as if she'd accidentally squashed a butterfly.

Melissa blinked. The clock was perfectly smooth. It wasn't moving.

She narrowed her eyes, reached down and brushed her fingers over the exact same spot. A vicious band of heat surged up her arm, holding her as firmly as a red-hot manacle. Too late to snatch her fingers back, the heat turned in on itself, her body following suit. She heard herself scream, the sound echoing into her head from somewhere in the distance. A horrible wrenching started in her arm, then slowly flowed through her entire body. Bones popped and cracked. Ligaments stretched and snapped with a sickening twang. She was being ripped apart, turned inside out. Daggers of pain ricocheted through her. She gave up struggling, letting the magic do as it would.

Accepting it didn't make it hurt any less, and she was all too aware of the world drifting from her grasp as raw pain sliced through her head. Her eyelids fluttered. Her last conscious thought was the clock. Her grandmother's clock.

A witch's clock.

\* \* \*

Jeremy's eyebrows lifted in wary curiosity as the air in the opposite corner began to sparkle. He'd felt the clock protest, had been thrown across the 'room' as it recoiled from her touch. But he hadn't expected the clock to be angry enough to fling the woman in here with him. After all, he'd been trapped inside the damn thing for years. Alone.

He watched as the glittering air solidified, the form of a woman appearing in the haze. He couldn't help wondering what she'd look like, this woman he'd felt so often yet never actually seen. The clock had practically purred its satisfaction every time she'd stroked her fingers across its surface. He'd felt her touch as clearly as if she'd been stroking her fingers over his naked skin. Without knowing, she'd been his fantasy lover.

Was the clock having a temper tantrum?

This was the first time she'd been anything other than gentle, but he'd felt the sudden fear radiating out from her. Surely the clock had felt it too. Would it have understood it hadn't been aimed at it? At them?

He shook his head, letting it drop wearily back against the wall as he did. He knew full well that the clock simply reacted to stimuli. It wasn't sentient. It couldn't think. He'd given up on trying to reason with it years ago.

Before the old witch had cursed him into the clock, he'd had his own power. It was nothing compared to hers -- he couldn't have saved himself from her malice if he'd tried -- but his power had its own strengths. He was empathetic. He read emotions, and he read them clearly. Following the changing emotions of people outside the clock had given him something to do.

And this woman, well... he stared at her still-wavering form. There was no mistaking her. Every day she'd stood near the clock, unknowingly sharing herself with him. He knew her better than any other living person.

Jeremy frowned across at the woman taking shape in the corner. She was sprawled awkwardly over the floor, her long dark hair and vibrant red dress a stark contrast to the pure white walls and floor he'd stared at for so long. The aftermath of extreme pain hung around her, her aura fractured and dark.

His lips twisted. He remembered the pain clearly. The witch hadn't allowed him the sanctuary of unconsciousness, so apparently, the clock was kinder in how it went about trapping people. Of their own volition his eyes traced down the woman's body, fascinated by the colors he hadn't seen in forever.

His prison was white. All white. The witch had been a sadistic old bitch. All he'd done was refuse her advances. He'd had a sweetheart back then. He wasn't interested. She'd refused to take "no" for an answer and had flung him into a living hell. A disgustingly white hell.

The witch had been trying to drive him insane. Absolute silence, nothing to look at. No scents, no flavors. The only surfaces were a hard, glossy white. It was sensory deprivation at its finest. She hadn't been able to stop him from feeling the emotions of people on the outside, though. Love, joy, pain, rage -- he didn't care what it was they felt. While he could sense the emotions, he knew he was still alive and, more importantly, still sane.

With an audible snap, the glimmering motes of air disappeared. The woman was still here. She was real. Solid. He levered himself up off the wall he'd been leaning against. His breath caught. He hadn't realized fashion had changed so dramatically.

The brilliant red dress was low cut, revealing an expanse of creamy skin that drew his eyes unerringly downwards. She'd been flung on the floor at an odd angle, her twisted body pulling down the soft fabric that clung to her breasts. One dark nipple peeked out of the bodice. Hurriedly, he looked away.

It was too long since he'd had a woman, and he already knew this one. Her emotions were always strong, comforting him even as her thoughts and feelings had bombarded him. Of everyone who'd come near the clock, she'd been their favorite -- his and the clock's.

Jeremy screwed his eyes shut, his forehead creased in strain. She didn't even know he existed, he wasn't being fair. He groaned, the sound echoing around the stark space. It was also impossible. After so long, he simply *had* to look. He turned back,

forcing his gaze to drift past the partially exposed nipple, then lower again, following the line of the dress.

She was lying mostly on her back, her legs spread as wide as the slim skirt would allow. He stepped softly around her, unwilling for her to wake before he'd looked his fill. The dress was split to the thigh, one leg totally exposed to his gaze. He simply stared, trying to ignore the way his cock throbbed. At the top of her thigh was darkness. If he squinted, he could just make out a scrap of lace masquerading as underwear. Fashion had definitely changed.

His eyes widened as a soft moan echoed around the room. He was used to silence, that and the sound of his own voice. The feminine little noise... he shook his head, desperate to clear his thoughts before she woke. Right this minute, a gentleman wouldn't be thinking about sex, and he certainly wouldn't have the hard-on from hell.

The woman stirred, her face suddenly screwed up in what he hoped was simply confusion. It wasn't every day that you got knocked out and flung inside a temperamental clock. Jeremy's fists clenched and he concentrated on breathing calmly, one deep breath after another. There was no logical reason why, but his stomach was churning at the thought that this woman -- *his* woman -- might be in pain. If he could have killed an inanimate object, he'd have cheerfully strangled the clock.

She groaned again, the sound stronger this time, and her eyelashes fluttered. Almost as if they were too heavy to lift on their own, her arm moved, wobbling its way upwards until a hand was resting over her eyes. Even half-conscious, her movements were graceful. He wondered what it would feel like to actually have those elegant fingers tracing patterns on his skin. It was one thing to feel them via the clock, but Jeremy had a sudden desperate urge to find out for himself if her skin was as soft as it looked.

He hunkered down beside her, one hand hovering over hers. Heart racing, he reached out and clasped her fingers in his. Instant heat radiated down his arm, half sensual, half painful. He jerked his fingers back but couldn't tear his eyes away from her face.



She was blinking slowly, fuzzily, and her eyes were still unfocused when she suddenly seemed to realize there was a strange man sitting beside her. Too hastily, she tried to lever herself upright. She swayed, flung her arm out in an unsteady attempt to catch herself, then collapsed in a heap against his chest.

## Chapter Two

Melissa sighed and snuggled closer to the warmth. She couldn't quite remember who he was, but he made a comfortable pillow. Right now, her head hurt and she ached all over. She couldn't think why that was either. The heady scent of warm male filled her head. She breathed it deep into her lungs, burrowing her nose closer into his chest. His heart beat steadily, the rhythmic *da dum, da dum* soothing her way back into the dream world she'd been floating in since...

The memory tugged at her, interrupting the peace, and she frowned. His shirt was partly unbuttoned and the tiny quirk of her lips tickled against his chest hair. She did it again, pleased when his skin shuddered against her mouth.

Since...

Since what?

Not being able to remember was annoying her.

The man shifted, a gentle rippling of his chest muscles her only warning. Strong arms lifted her, rearranging her legs so they were settled between the V of his, her back now resting against his chest. Until he moved her, she hadn't realized just how comfortable she'd been. She murmured a small protest and tried to swat him away, grumbling at the cooler air making its way down the bodice of her dress.

She felt his laughter more than she heard it, his chest shaking gently against her back. Long fingers trailed through her hair, brushing it away from her eyes.

"Are you going to wake up yet, Sleeping Beauty?"

The voice was a seductive whisper of sound, the sort of voice she could happily listen to all day. Warm, masculine, amused -- sexy. She smiled sleepily. It was a shame she couldn't remember who he was.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty." The fingers continued to stroke her hair, his thumb swirling around her temple. "Time to wake up now."

She nestled closer, a tiny frown tugging at her mouth as he brushed a lock of hair from her face. It let the light push against her closed eyelids. She turned her head into his chest, muttering about mornings. She was *not* a morning person.

"Uh, uh." The voice sounded amused again. "You're not going back to sleep. Wake up and talk to me."

*Wake up and talk to me?* That didn't sound like the seductive words of an impatient lover.

Melissa levered a single eye open, trying not to wince too obviously at the light that poured in. She shook her head carefully, the memory of how it ached too clear to risk a sudden movement. "No."

His thumb traced a soft line around her lips. "Yes," he whispered, his breath tickling her ear.

Melissa flicked her tongue out, its tip scraping over his thumb. He froze, every muscle in his body suddenly rigid. Basking in the surge of power, she did it again, then wriggled her back closer against his chest at the same time. Both eyes flicked open as her bottom bumped against his erection. "*Glarmf!*" she exclaimed in surprise.

Strong hands wrapped around her waist, pushing her firmly forwards -- and away from the intriguing hardness. "What was that?" His voice was strained.

"The light!"

"Oh, that." She felt him nodding against her hair, five o'clock shadow scraping erotically between the strands. "You get used to the never-ending white after a while."

Melissa opened her eyes wider, blinking rapidly as she realized what he was talking about. *Who is he anyway?* She ignored the thought, concentrating instead on what seemed the safer option -- just exactly where she was.

And that, apparently, was inside a largish box. Twelve feet square with only the suggestion of a line where the walls met the ceiling and floor. Nothing else. Which probably explained why she was sitting on the floor. Her butt was already going numb.

She squeezed her eyes shut, wondering if it would look the same when she opened them. Surely not?

Technicolored memories flashed behind her closed eyes. Getting home from the cocktail party, standing in the hall, touching the clock...

She opened her eyes. The room was still the same very boring, slightly glossy shade of white. She started to speak, coughed, and cleared her throat when only a strangled squeak came out. She didn't really want to know, but... "Where are we?"

"Inside the clock."

Nope, she definitely hadn't wanted to know that. She thought for a moment, her mind horribly clear. "And you are?"

She felt him straightening behind her, but didn't dare to look.

"Jeremy Jones."

She'd never heard of him.

"A witch cursed the clock." He hesitated then continued, his voice somehow soothing despite the weirdness of what he was saying. "She cursed me inside it."

*Uh huh...*

"So why am I in here?" Melissa winced. Her voice sounded tiny, and ridiculously afraid. He'd obviously heard the fear because he leant forward, pulling her shoulders back to rest comfortably against his chest. Pinpoints of heat seared her shoulder blades where they touched him.

"I have no idea."

A very nasty thought was jumping up and down in her brain, waving its arms and trying to flag her attention. It was wild enough that she even managed to ignore the odd prickling where their bodies touched. "The witch. What was her name?"

"Eugenie Crockett."

*Shit!* "That's my grandmother." She started to shake as another horrible thought plonked itself into her head. "She's been dead for three years." *She won't be coming back to let us out anytime soon...*

"Ah." The word was somewhere off in the distance. Closer in, the room started to whirl. "Don't you dare faint on me, woman!"

Melissa suddenly found herself bent in half, a firm hand on her back holding her head between her knees. It was damned uncomfortable but when she tried to sit up again the hand didn't budge.

"I won't faint," she murmured, wondering how he felt about women vomiting on him instead. The pressure on her back eased and she sat slowly upright, a curious tingling where his hand had rested. Even through her dress, she'd felt the most amazing heat radiating from his skin.

"Good."

She found herself hiding a grin at his aggrieved tone. She took a deep breath, gathering her courage. "My name's Melissa," she offered, twisting around to look at him.

For one interminable moment, she thought she was going to faint again. Deep brown eyes looked back at her, concern deepening the creases in an already weary face. He looked no more than thirty years old, yet his eyes were... knowing. Much older than he was.

And scarily similar to the eyes that had haunted her dreams for years. The dreams had been most frequent when she'd stayed at her grandmother's. Then, gradually, the soulful gaze had reached into her ordinary dreams. His eyes had caressed her senses almost every night since her grandmother's death. The clock, she realized, sick to her stomach.

"How old are you?" she asked abruptly, unable to tear her gaze from his. His lips creased into a wry smile, and she couldn't help smiling back despite the circumstances.

"What year is it?"

"You've been here that long?" She watched her own eyes widen, her face perfectly reflected in the depth of his eyes.

Jeremy nodded. "Since 1942."

"Oh my God! That's..." She paused, her whirling mind struggling even with the simplest arithmetic. "That's nearly sixty-five years!"

He raised a tired eyebrow. "That long, huh?"

Melissa nodded dumbly. What could you say to a man who'd been imprisoned by a member of her family for so long? What would he possibly think of her? Sixty-five years? My God! "And you've been here --" she gestured wildly about the small, unutterably *boring* space, "-- all that time?"

"Fraid so," he agreed equitably.

She slumped back against him, unable to look at his face. How could he possibly feel anything but condemnation for her family? For her?

"I don't, you know," he whispered into her hair.

She sat upright, narrowly missing hitting his chin with the crown of her head. She was quite certain she hadn't spoken out loud.

"I did have something in common with your grandmother," he told her, his voice wry. "I'm empathetic. I can read your emotions -- and that one was very clear." One hand clamped firmly around her waist, drawing her closer so she was again leaning hard up against his chest. His other hand strayed into her hair, apparently unable to resist running his fingers down its length. "You have beautiful hair," he murmured, "so soft."

Melissa could feel her cheeks heating up. *No one* had ever told her she was beautiful, and especially not a man she felt so... connected with. He wasn't lying either; his swollen cock, blatantly hard against her bottom, testified to his arousal.

She sagged. Of course, she was also the first woman he'd laid eyes on in sixty-five years. He was probably a very sexually frustrated man.

He laughed into her hair, twining his fingers even more immovably into the strands as he did so. Then he tugged, gently at first, until her head was tilted back. He held her in place, forcing her to meet his eyes.

"You are not your grandmother." He tugged sharply for emphasis. "And I have felt everything you felt for years. Laughter. Pain. Everything. *You* kept me sane."

Melissa blinked, drowning in the chocolate brown of his eyes. Could that explain why she felt so comfortable with him? And why she'd never been terribly interested in any of the men who'd chased her over the years?

"Every time you ran your fingers across the wood of the clock," he continued, his voice a swath of velvet gliding over every inch of her exposed skin, "I felt your fingers run across my skin. I know you."

His fingers shook free of her hair, but one arm remained possessively wrapped around her waist. The heat of his skin against hers was searing her wits. She didn't even object when he tipped her chin up with a single finger and bent his head over hers. His voice went husky. "I want you."

She was lost. Trapped in the most gloriously soul-searing kiss she'd ever experienced. Warm lips melded over hers. His tongue traced a damp line around her mouth then teased at the seam of her lips. And all the time his eyes were looking into hers, searching her heart.

She felt it, the moment he was certain of her permission. As she softened, letting herself relax against him, his entire body hardened. Even his mouth was forceful, no longer requesting, but demanding entry. She sighed against his mouth, swamped by the sheer need radiating from him. For the moment, it was too difficult to remember that he was a stranger. It was much easier to simply... believe.

*To believe? In what?*

The thought swirled around the back of her mind even as she opened her mouth to his, her own tongue making a tentative foray against his teeth and gums. His hands locked around her waist holding her possessively against him. No other man had ever made her feel quite so special, so cherished.

And no other man had tasted quite so good. There was none of the sharpness of breath mints to overpower his masculine flavor. Cinnamon? A hint of vanilla, perhaps? It was hard to decide. Melissa's tongue darted out, dancing erotically against his. Who cared what it was? He simply tasted good.

Reluctantly, Jeremy pushed her away. His lips lingered, unwilling to break contact. She moaned softly into his mouth, her fingers curling into his collar and tugging him back within her reach. It was exactly the sound he'd imagined her making when he had her naked underneath him. For an instant he let himself return to the haven of her mouth. A contented murmur of approval drifted up to him, her lips brushing warmly against his.

It wasn't fair. She barely knew him...

He pulled back again, this time forcing himself to hold her at arm's length. He was holding on to his control by a hair's breadth and her muttering protest wasn't helping things. He stared down at her face. Slack with passion, her lips were faintly swollen and redder than he remembered. There wasn't a shred of lipstick contributing to their rosy color. She blinked, sexy as a kitten, and looked up at him reproachfully. It seemed she didn't share his scruples.

He couldn't help himself; he twined his fingers through her hair, his thumbs digging into her scalp. Her eyelashes fluttered as she let herself relax. Jeremy couldn't drag his eyes away from her hair. Each strand slithered through his fingers, softer than the finest silk, yet it was still dark and thick. The color... he paused in his massage and lifted a strand up for closer inspection. It was a fascinating shade of dark brown -- the color of loamy soil -- yet there was also a hint of rich burgundy. He wondered what she'd look like, spread naked across a swath of green grass with her creamy skin and dark hair. In his mind, she took on the image of a wood nymph. The dress she wore was pretty, but unnecessary.

He smiled at the direction his thoughts were taking. With her here beside him, he was complete. He didn't even mind the stark white prison. It didn't stop him from thinking like some kind of caveman, though. No matter how emotionally content he suddenly found himself, he wanted her naked and pliant, moaning and writhing under him.

He *wanted* her.

"Jeremy?"



"Mmm?"

For a heartbeat the room was silent. He heard her draw a deep breath, her words rushing out on the exhalation. "Why did you stop?"

He groaned. He'd been miles away and for a moment he'd almost forgotten she was real. He was too used to thinking of her as an imaginary sprite, apt to disappear on a whim.

His hands were still resting on her hips and he used them to turn her, shuffling until she was facing him and sitting cross-legged between his spread thighs. His erection was still straining uncomfortably against his pants, but he figured physical proof of his desire wouldn't go astray right now. She'd sounded suspiciously miffed at his abrupt withdrawal. His mouth quirked as she pushed ineffectually at her skirt. It had gathered around her waist, leaving her panties fully exposed to his hot gaze. She squirmed, and he let his lips widen into a grin at her predicament.

She had no idea how sexy she was, all rumpled and disheveled...

"You hardly know me, honey," he explained gruffly. "I feel like I've known you for years, but..." He shrugged expressively. He could hardly tell her that he wanted to strip her clothes off, throw her face down on the floor, and fuck her senseless. He didn't want to scare her.

*How far could she run?*

Ruthlessly, he squashed the tempting thought, forcing himself to make eye contact instead. It felt dishonest somehow, to be reading her emotions when she had no hope of doing the same to him. But he couldn't help it. Her face and eyes were wonderfully expressive and she made no attempt to hide her thoughts. He'd hurt her and he didn't quite understand why.

Melissa tugged again at her skirt, her fingers moving restlessly. She looked up at him, then as quickly looked away again. There was no question that she was trying to avoid him -- he knew from bitter experience that there was absolutely nothing to look at inside the clock.

"Your eyes," she said finally. Her voice was little more than a whisper.

Jeremy tried to sound encouraging as he prompted her. "My eyes?"

She blushed, and he had to clamp down on both his imagination and his cock which had leaped to attention. His mind had instantly provided him with a too-erotic visual of him watching a blush travel across her naked abdomen and breasts. He was getting desperate, and he knew it. Imagination was a fine thing in its place but he wanted to see her nude. Now.

"My dreams," she explained. "I've felt you in my dreams every night. Seen you too," she added self-consciously, her blush deepening as she finished in a rush. "You said you feel like you already know me. I've dreamed about you too."

"Oh." That had to take the stakes for a mindless comment, but he was honestly struck dumb by her shy admission. "So, um..."

She shifted closer, her body brushing tantalizingly against his shirt without ever quite touching. "I want you too," she breathed.

"Maybe this isn't a good idea." He tried to back away, only to find his back literally pressed up against the wall. Melissa simply scooted closer. "We've both been lonely..." he tried hopelessly.

"Exactly," she purred, "and now we're no longer alone."

"But..."

"Shut up and take your shirt off." Her fingers were already tugging at his buttons.

Helplessly, he held his wrist out to her as she unclasped his cuff-links. Whatever he'd expected, it hadn't been that she'd turn aggressor on him. He found it difficult to imagine a woman taking the sexual lead. Times had certainly changed, and he wasn't quite sure it was for the better. On the other hand, there was something terribly sexy about a woman knowing what she wanted -- and taking it.

He couldn't quite decide whether to laugh or scowl, and settled for a screwed-up grimace that was probably somewhere in between. Then Melissa slid back, stretching her legs straight out in front of her and smoothing out her skirt so it again covered her almost to the ankles. He felt his lips crease upward. There was something extra sexy

knowing just how little movement it would take before her nipples popped out from under their precarious covering. Not only that, but he was finding it hard to forget how ridiculously tiny her panties were, and how easily he could tear them away.

He straightened, ready to act on his thoughts, only to have her waggle a finger at him. Her eyes were filled with laughter. Obviously, he wasn't as difficult to read as he'd thought.

"Uh uh. I told you to take your shirt off."

"So you did." In one fluid movement he'd lifted it over his head, baring his chest to her view. Her gaze scanned him critically, lingering at the bulge in his trousers.

"Very nice. Now the pants." Her eyebrows lifted as he hesitated, feeling awkward. She laughed then, low and throaty, and snapped her fingers. "I'm waiting."

## Chapter Three

*Please let him take them off, please let him take them off...*

Her sultry sex goddess routine wouldn't last much longer. Actually, she was surprised she'd managed to keep it going for this long. She had absolutely no idea what to do next and was really hoping he'd take over soon. Still, it was fun watching him get naked. And if she had to get trapped inside an otherwise featureless clock, well, thank goodness it was with someone she could --

The thought evaporated as he half turned his back, slowly sliding his trousers over his hips until his ass was bare. Firm, rounded, and oh-so-gropeable. God, how she wanted to touch! His gaze locked on hers, a gleam of humor flickering deep in the heavenly brown. Her own eyes were probably bugging out of her head, she realized. A warm blush stole over her cheeks.

He wore nothing under his trousers. What was a girl to do *other* than look? A final sexy little wiggle of his hips and he was stark naked and... oh man, what a body! The slightly baggy trousers and long-sleeved shirt hadn't given a hint of what he was hiding below. For a moment she wondered how his skin had kept a lightly tanned glow over sixty-five years spent without seeing the sun, then dismissed the thought as irrelevant. Staring at his body was way more interesting. He had the sculpted lines of a classical statue with defined muscles and a slim waist. Nothing overblown, and everything in proportion.

Her eyes dropped lower. Well... maybe not quite *everything*. The erection she'd felt jammed up against her back was even more impressive than she'd imagined.

She licked her lips, her tongue providing a hint of cool moisture on flesh that had suddenly gone bone-dry. On the inside, however, was a different story altogether. It was near-impossible to ignore the heat -- and moisture -- that was quickly pooling

between her thighs. Melissa shifted position, spreading her legs a little and vainly hoping for a cooling breeze. She squirmed as his eyes locked on the tiny movement. The heat between her legs boiled over, flooding upwards through her veins. All at once, the touch of her dress on her sensitized skin was agony. It was simply too much to bear and, without thinking about what she was doing, she reached down, grasped the hem of the skirt, and tugged the dress up and over her head.

Cooler air raced over her, a phantom wind that teased and played. Jeremy's gaze had followed the movements of her dress, watching as she tossed it to land in a bright splash of color against the far wall. Other than that, his attention hadn't left her body. And still he hadn't moved.

"Stand up."

Eyes widening, Melissa levered herself upright, her hands resting on the wall for support. She could feel her chest heaving, could hear his ragged breathing.

His eyes followed her shaky movement. "Don't move," he said huskily. She doubted she could have if she'd tried. The heat in his eyes was burning her up from the inside out. She desperately needed the support of the solid wall behind her.

Jeremy took a single long stride across the room. He was so close she could feel the warmth of his skin. Unconsciously she reached out, wanting to run her fingers through the scattering of hair on his chest, *needing* to suck his flat nipple into her mouth and taste him again.

"No." He grasped her hands, held them back against the wall. "My turn first."

Once he seemed certain she wasn't going to argue, he released her wrists, letting his hands drop to her shoulders instead. The pressure was slight, but uncompromising. Melissa found her shoulder blades pressed hard against the cold surface. She gasped at the sensation. While her front was still on fire, her ass was comparatively freezing, highlighting the heat of his hands as they drifted slowly across her collarbone.

"Close your eyes," he whispered huskily. "Let me love you."

The last few words were so soft she doubted he'd meant her to hear them. Her heart lurched and she looked up at him, wondering. His eyes were dark with passion.

His fingers trailed soothing swirls of heat across her shoulders and neck as he waited for her to decide. She closed her eyes.

Immediately his hands returned to their gentle exploration. His fingers brushed a path up her neck and over her face. His thumbs feathered across her eyebrows, then smoothed gently over her closed eyelids. She smiled as he planted a tiny wet kiss on the end of her nose, then gasped as his fingers swooped, delving into the crease of her mouth. In retaliation, she sucked on a finger, demonstrating with her tongue exactly what she wouldn't mind doing to another part of him. She sucked hard, then let her tongue flutter around his fingertip. He tried to withdraw it, and she nipped sharply on the fleshy skin at its base, inwardly grinning at his half-smothered attempt at a curse.

Melissa pushed her hips forward, taking advantage of his momentary distraction. His cock bumped against her stomach, his skin as soft and smooth as she'd imagined. Without thinking, she lifted her hands from the wall. She wanted to touch, dammit!

"Oh no you don't."

She shivered as his voice rumbled into her ear, his hands catching hers and pressing them firmly back onto the wall. He took a step forward, crowding her, and inserted one thigh between her legs. Then he lowered his chest until she was crushed, skin-to-skin, between him and the wall. His cock ground into her stomach and he rocked suggestively against her.

Melissa groaned as his thigh brushed over her already swollen clit. For once in her life she wasn't the slightest bit interested in foreplay. All this teasing was going to kill her. Her pussy clenched as he bumped her again, purposely rubbing the lacy fabric of her panties over her too-sensitive skin. A flood of moisture dampened the material, and she wriggled against him. She wanted him to rip her panties off and sink himself deep inside her. It felt like every drop of blood had gathered between her legs, and her cunt was throbbing out its urgency in perfect rhythm with her heartbeat.

"So..." He whispered the word against her lips, his head hovering tantalizingly close.

"Kiss me," she demanded. Caught as she was, she couldn't even roll her hips against him.

Jeremy's lips left her mouth. He kissed his way down her chin until his lips were nestled between her breasts. Without his body pressing hotly against hers, there was a rush of cooler air. Her nipples hardened, and she shivered as he licked a lazy route across one breast.

With her eyes still closed, the tiniest touch of his skin on hers was unbearably erotic. She moaned softly as he blew warm air on one nipple, unable to stop herself arching it into his mouth. For a moment he suckled, rolling the taut flesh between his tongue and the roof of his mouth. He nipped gently. She shuddered as the brief pain quickly turned to sharp pleasure. The world shrunk around her. She felt her features growing slack. Her breast and his mouth. Nothing else mattered.

Abruptly, her hands grew cold as he released them. There was no question of her lifting her arms to touch him now -- she needed the support they gave her against the wall. While his mouth continued to torture one nipple, strong fingers began to knead the other. She barely noticed him sliding his other hand between their tightly pressed bodies.

She squealed as her hips jerked forwards, his mouth on her breast greedily suckling her deep. The fabric of her panties tore as he tugged, the harsh sound of ripping lace drowned in her gasp. Before she could gather her breath to protest, Jeremy had thrust his fingers deep inside her, the flat of his palm rubbing enticingly against her curls even as his fingers twisted and probed.

Melissa's hips jerked mindlessly into his hand, her body overwhelmed by his mouth and hands. As her hips thrust forward, his mouth and fingers pinched lightly on her nipples, and the friction of his hand on her clit was almost unbearable. The heat between them grew, a furious bubbling energy that threatened to swallow her whole. It was no longer the warm prickling she'd felt at first whenever their skin made contact. Every touch was a flame that flickered through her skin, an unbearably explosive pressure.

Even the wall was no longer cold. Flames had raced across her skin, spreading around her back until the wall threw the heat back into her body. She squirmed, unable to escape the relentless pressure of his tongue and hands. The movement just fed the gathering heat, fanning it further out of control.

A high pitched mewling surrounded them, thrusting her back into reality for a few seconds. It was *her* body jerking helplessly against his, and the keening moans were coming from *her* mouth. She forgot her embarrassment as he dragged his hand free from between her legs. The other hand fell away from her breast. For a moment she stood there, illogically bereft. Her eyes opened in protest, and she focused briefly on his wracked face. His eyes were wide, watching her intently as he lifted her hips, then lowered her slowly over his erection.

The tip of his cock teased at her entrance, slipping in the juices she could feel trickling down her leg. Her eyelids fluttered as her body tried to clench around him. His arms trembled. He lifted her up, away from the cock she so badly wanted to fill the burning emptiness he'd created.

Melissa rested her hands on his shoulders and linked her legs around his waist. She was *not* going to let him finish now. She rocked gently, tempting him with her widespread legs. With an oath, he slammed her down, impaling her on his rigid shaft. Her entire body shuddered at the impact. The head of his cock rested satisfyingly close against her womb.

She buried her face in his hair, and wrapped her arms around his neck as he lifted her slightly upwards then let her drop back down. The rhythm continued, gradually increasing in tempo as he neared his own release. Each time he lifted her, her clit brushed against his tummy. Each time he let her fall back onto his shaft it did the same. Even Jeremy disappeared from her mind as a wall of flames towered over her, rushing toward her and swarming through her bloodstream. It engulfed her, then threw her heavenwards in a streak of glorious color. There was no choice, nothing she could do other than let the orgasm roll over her. Somewhere in the distance she heard Jeremy's hoarse cry of completion.



## Chapter Four

*Oh.*

*My.*

*God.*

What the hell had happened there? Jeremy stared at his closed eyelids, appreciating the red swirls of color as he waited for his breathing to return to something more sensible. He'd had plenty of sexual experience but that... that had been spectacular.

He trailed his fingers through Melissa's hair, then forced an eye open to appreciate it more closely. It had fallen in a luxurious wave over his face, half blinding him when he'd slumped to the floor, pulling her down with him. She was still sprawled across him where she'd fallen, her legs twined with his. All he could see was her shoulder. It was covered with a fine sheen of perspiration that made her skin glow in the pearly light.

*Pearly light?*

The light in the clock was always harshly white. It had never softened, day or night, and he'd grown used to waking with the irritating glare filling his vision. But this was... muted? His eyebrows furrowed.

He shook his head, and went to push her hair off his face. He paused. Something hard had dug into his back as he moved. Another object was cutting into his ass. Yet there was nothing in the clock.

*Or was there?*

The scent of sex surrounded them. His cum was still wet on their legs. Maybe their lovemaking had somehow changed things?

He pushed himself upright, eager now to see what had changed. Even as he did so, he was laughing ruefully at himself. He'd already been given Melissa today -- what more could he possibly want?

As he sat up, Melissa murmured a protest, her fingers gripping into his shoulders as he tried to prize her off. She reached up and swept her hair back, still grumbling. Her eyes were open but they were still cloudy with lust. She started to smile up at him, then blinked rapidly, her gaze focused somewhere behind his shoulder.

"Jeremy?" Her voice was soft. "What happened?"

He finally raised his head. "I have no idea..."

His voice trailed off. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes, then opened them again.

The room in front of him was an entry hall, the open front door swinging gently in the breeze. His stunned brain sorted slowly through the frantic messages his eyes were sending back to his head. He reached behind him, his hand groping for the treads of the staircase they were lying against.

"We're out." He heard the wonder in his voice.

Melissa smiled, her face still stunned. "We're back in my house. I'd thought we were going to be stuck in the clock forever." She turned to the spindly-legged side table, the only piece of furniture in the small room. Her eyebrows drew together. She stared blankly at the clear surface. "The clock's gone."

"Huh?" Jeremy was barely paying attention, too busy drinking in all the colors and scents of a regular house.

"The clock," she explained. "It's always sat on the table right there by the front door."

Jeremy forced his thoughts together as he glanced at the living room that opened off the entry. "Are you a really rotten housekeeper?" he asked softly.

Her eyebrows came impossibly closer. "No. Why?"

"It looks like your house was broken into tonight. Look." He nudged her in the direction he was looking.

The room was a mess. Chairs were overturned, and the contents of drawers were scattered through the room. Even the magazine rack had been emptied.

"Oh." Melissa blinked. "The front door blew open just before... before the clock..." She waved her hands in frustration. "You know what I mean!"

Jeremy quirked an amused eyebrow. "Before the clock sucked you in and forced you to have the best sex of your life?"

"That too! Anyway," she continued, "I wonder if maybe the clock was trying to protect me from the thieves? Maybe it wasn't wind that opened the door, but a human?"

"Could be. And I guess they took the clock too," he agreed.

"But that doesn't explain how we're here yet the clock isn't."

He smoothed a finger across the faint crease between her brows. "I wouldn't think too hard about it, if I were you. It is magic, after all. There's no logic involved."

Still looking confused, Melissa nodded. It seemed she was having trouble getting used to the idea that the clock might really be gone. It had been a part of her life for a very long time. Time to divert her... "You know what this means?" he asked, putting on his best impression of an evil leer.

Melissa stared at him. Then she blinked. A faint grin lightened her face. "You're staying?" Her smile widened. "Guess we'd better find you some clothes then."

"Hah!" Jeremy scowled, struggling to hold back a happy grin. He reached out and kicked the front door closed. "I have plans for you, young lady, and they certainly don't involve clothes!"

So much for calling the cops to report the break in, Melissa thought bemusedly as she found herself being unceremoniously slung over his shoulder, fireman-style. Below her, the stairs were dropping from sight as Jeremy climbed briskly upwards, each pounding footstep making her naked breasts jiggle disconcertingly against his equally naked back.

*Naked...*

What the hell was she thinking? It was one thing to accept she'd been sucked into a magical clock, then have wild monkey sex with the total stranger who just happened to have an uncanny resemblance to the man she'd been dreaming about, but really... okay, so she was starting to question her sanity on that one. It was either that or accept she'd had a little too much to drink at the party earlier in the evening -- which she knew damned well she hadn't.

A particularly rough jolt interrupted her thoughts. She couldn't hold in the tremble as her nipple rubbed on his -- naked -- back. Her body was apparently running on a whole different wavelength to her brain. The little jolt of awareness spread rapidly under her skin, taking a direct route straight past her stomach and settling between her thighs. She was still tender there from earlier. And thinking about what they'd done... she shuddered and let her hands unclench, half reluctantly welcoming the fresh heat that blossomed under her skin.

It had been fabulous. *He'd* been fabulous. And it had been way too long since she'd felt that kind of physical or mental connection. And his ass was pretty darned neat too --

Her breath left her with a whoosh as she landed face down on her bed, her quilted satin comforter feeling almost harsh after the soft familiarity of his skin rubbing against hers for the past few minutes.

She gasped as his hands burrowed under her, trapping her arms by her sides as his fingers plucking roughly at her nipples. The mattress dipped as Jeremy eased his weight over her, one knee to either side of her hips.

"Too much thinking, not enough paying attention," he whispered. His breath stirred her hair and, apparently seeing her uncontrolled shiver, he puffed lightly in her ear. His tongue flicked out, licking a damp path around her ear, then he blew again.

She shuddered again, his soft chuckle rumbling through her as he pressed his chest hard against her back, sandwiching her between the bed and his body. All coherent thoughts fled.

"Ah --" she attempted.

"Shhh." His tongue traced a lazy path around the side of her neck, his fingers tweaking her nipples into hard little buds. "Just relax." His knee slipped between her thighs, nudging them apart.

Hah! As if that was going to happen...

Melissa arched her back against him, half trying to push away from his gently stroking knee, half trying to push herself closer to him. As if sensing her intent, he shifted his weight slightly, holding her more firmly in place. For an agonizing moment she thought he was going to stop. Then, just as she thought the anticipation was going to be too much to bear, he pushed her thighs wider then lowered his hips until they were resting on hers.

"Please..."

Again she thought he was going to stop there, leaving her hanging. She wriggled, half pleading, half demanding, as the cooler air wended its way between her thighs, reminding her just how vulnerable she was in this position, her legs spread wide and her hands trapped by her side. She shivered, the involuntary movement rasping her nipples unexpectedly against the satin even as his hands slowly began to once again knead her breasts.

"Please..." she moaned, uncaring that she was begging. Her entire body was alive, thrumming with the need to writhe against something -- anything -- yet unable to. It was almost as if he knew exactly how she felt and was just waiting...

A single thought speared through the sexual haze. He was an empath. He *did* know exactly what he was doing to her. Theoretically, that also meant he'd know before she exploded from the withheld orgasm. She hoped...

Then she felt his cock nudging against her thighs before coming to rest touching her cunt.

Just.

She attempted to thrust her hips upwards, bumping her bottom against his confining weight, desperate to have him thrust inside her. The longer he waited, the tighter the coil of anticipation, and the more urgent her need to have him inside her.

Now!

"Getting desperate, are we?" he murmured in her ear.

"Fuck me."

"Was that an order?" he asked, his voice amused.

Melissa groaned as he shifted his weight ever so slightly until the tip of his cock was hovering a hair's breadth from her clit. Frustrated, she tried to spread her legs wider. "Yes. Fuck me!"

Jeremy thrust his cock inside her in one abrupt movement. Ready as she'd been for him, aroused as she was, she'd almost forgotten just how good it felt to be filled by him.

Suddenly he moved, pulling her hips down the bed, the scrape of the satin on her clit dragging a surprised gasp from her. She found herself in the same position as before, Jeremy's chest once again pressing her into the bed, his arms trapping hers beside her, her breasts still caught under her in his hands. Her legs were now hanging half over the side of the bed and Jeremy had moved so he was kneeling on the floor. At this angle his cock lodged even more deeply in her than before.

He pulled out, Melissa almost crying at the sudden loss of sensation, then thrust back into her cunt, hard and deep. Automatically, her hips rose to meet him, welcoming him back in. Each stroke pushed her closer to the edge. With the sound of his balls slapping wetly against her filling her ears, she screwed her eyes closed and let herself get lost in stars that were already filling her vision. He'd wound her so tight, she thought she'd never survive the explosion of white light and darkness that enveloped her without warning.

\* \* \*

Melissa awoke to a feeling of absolute peace. She was snuggled into her comfy old pillow, her comforter pulled up to her chin. She was tired, and she ached pleasurably between her legs. Her mind spun lazily back over the evening's events, barely registering the fact she'd had sex with a near-stranger -- again -- and in her own bed this time. Damn, it had been good. Of course, she could have been dreaming.

Or not...

Someone tugged at her hair. She tried to bat whoever it was away but they didn't budge. All she managed was to pull her hair again. She forced her eyes open.

Jeremy was lying beside her, propped up on his elbow with a long strand of her hair wrapped firmly around his finger. Apparently she wasn't going anywhere soon.

He grinned down at her. It was totally infectious -- she couldn't help grinning back. He raised an eyebrow, possibly not expecting her natural reaction. He tugged on her hair again, gently but inexorably pulling her closer. Without releasing her hair, he lowered himself until he was once again on top of her, his lips brushing softly over hers.

"You do know we belong together, don't you?" he murmured before sealing her lips with his. For an instant, her eyes widened at the unexpectedness of his comment.

Melissa sighed and let herself relax back into the pillow, content to let him take the lead -- for now. The flutter of his lips against hers was heaven. Jeremy's hand strayed between her legs, his fingers stroking softly across her clit. She arched her back, reaching out for him.

The first light of dawn was just creeping over the horizon as she once again closed her eyes. She barely registered the single glint as the sunlight spread across her dressing table -- reflecting off the face of her grandmother's old clock.

## **Amy O'Connor**

Amy O'Connor lives in the Australian outback. When she's not writing (which isn't very often) she can usually be found attempting to round up her sons, cats, and poultry, or trying to restore her hundred-year-old garden. Occasionally, she even manages to sneak in a few hours reading a good book. Unfortunately, since that tends to involve running away and hiding on the side verandah, it doesn't happen as regularly as she'd like!