

Student	Monique Mitchell, TECH, 12th Grade
Title	The Town With Silver Leaves
Result	2nd Place - Tie

The Town With Silver Leaves

‘The Fall Festival is upon us,’ were the words in everyone’s minds, as the large grandfather clock that overlooked the town struck six p.m. It was the time of year, every October, that Roothallow came alive with golden leaves, warm drinks, and laughter echoing through the air. The Fall Festival was a special tradition passed down from generations and generations before. Legends say that this festival actually came from the clock. They say that the clock was a God that chose their town to pass his judgment. As there’s no way to prove this, and no action from this God, Roothallow simply let it be forgotten and continued with their lives. Nothing ever changed in Roothallow and anyone that tried to be different was put to rest. Little did they know that this October would bring change that was not wanted.

It started with the wind coming earlier than usual, flowing through silver leafed trees. Trees that were never there before. They appeared overnight, tall with skin like bark and leaves the color of silver, shimmering under the moonlight. They stood in front of the town, forming a perfect circle, as if done with intention. Strangely no one remembered planting them. But no one could cut them down. Every axe that tried was dulled or even broken as if striking hard stone. Fog surrounded the town, menacingly.

“They’re just trees,” said the Mayor. But his smile was thin, and he kept glancing towards the clock, as if something was wrong. The people that tried to question this were not heard from again and everyone else was thankful.

But then came the animals. Deers with too many eyes, birds that sang backwards and a fox found in the middle of the circle of trees with its body twisted unnaturally, jaw wide open as if it died

screaming. Oddly enough, all these incidents were found in front of the clock but once again it was passed off as a coincidence.

Rebellious teens secretly wandered towards the trees, phones flashing, but later came back pale as a ghost and shaking terribly. They wouldn't say what they had seen, only that inside the circle felt wrong. It was cold as though the trees soaked up all the warmth. There was one sound they could hear and that was the chime from the clock, ticking in the background like a bomb.

Still, the town carried on with its tradition. They decorated as they did normally, sang songs, and had activities. Everything was fine. 'This was Roothallow, everything is the same, nothing ever changes,' was the reason given.

When the festival night arrived the town was glowing with orange lights. The smell of baked goodies filled the air. Everyone was having a good time, or so they tried. Looking closer the smiles were a bit too wide, laughter a little too loud. Secretly they were all just trying to drown out the weird feeling creeping up their backs.

Then suddenly, all anyone heard was the echoing dong of the clock striking twelve. Then the strange trees began to hum. It was low at first, like something that you could feel more than hear. It grew louder and louder with each passing second. People began covering their ears, crying out as the sound of the hum grew stronger with the clock still ticking on. Then the lights flickered and the town went completely silent.

And from the circle of trees, they came.

Figures, dozens of them, crawled up from the ground as if they were escaping from their cages. They were tall and thin with faces that looked like masks sewn to their own, made out of human skin. They stood in the middle of the trees, unmoving, only staring with eyes that didn't look like it belonged to them. Then they began to dance. It wasn't graceful at all, it was violent and harsh with their limbs jerking at unnatural angles. They danced to the rhythm of the clock, which no one had noticed was working again.

The people dropped to their knees in prayer, begging their God to stop this evil. And it worked. The figures slowly stopped dancing and went back to standing still. The people were still very hesitant to move, unsure if they were being tricked. And then the hands of the clock began

spinning out of control, and the humming got louder again. Immediately everyone in the town heard one word in their head, '*CHANGE.*' They looked at each other in confusion and then looked back at the clock. '*ACCEPT,*' it said. They had no idea what they needed to do. In their minds everything in this town was perfectly acceptable. They were unwilling to do what was needed.

Seeing this the hands stopped spinning. And the figures started moving towards them.

People screamed in fear, some tried to run but it was too late. The figures gained speed and they were caught. Once the figures caught someone, they dug their fingers deep into their face and began ripping the skin off. The mayor who hid behind a car, heard the sound of one of their residents screaming and looked over the car just to see the skin from their face forcefully torn off. He watched as the figure brought the skin up to their own face and pasted it on. It was a horrific sight to witness but he couldn't dwell on it for too long. He ran to the clock as quickly as he could and dropped to his knees. He begged God to spare him, he cared little for the town, he promised he would change. He didn't even get to finish his sentence before he was caught and put through the same torture. Throughout the night, the figures continued their massacre.

Finally the town went quiet once again, for the third time that night.

No human was left alive. The figures danced.

The next morning came and continued as normal. The figures with their new faces took the places of the humans that lived in Roothallow. This was now their home. The bodies also stayed, scattered across the town, decomposing over time.

The clock disappeared and no one ever found out what happened to the town that refused to accept change.