

Note From the Authour

The Hunger Clock examines how efficiency, once enthroned, can eclipse life. A system calibrated to prevent death will optimize for bare survival; dashboards improve while horizons shrink. The parable follows a scientist who perfects triage so completely that a people learn to live at the brink, sustained by “just enough.” Charts ascend; lives narrow.

I wrote this after the Calgary Distress Centre abandoned me. The piece clarifies a simple proposition: a continuing pulse does not constitute help. Vital signs alone fail as a measure of care or repair.

Do what
you must



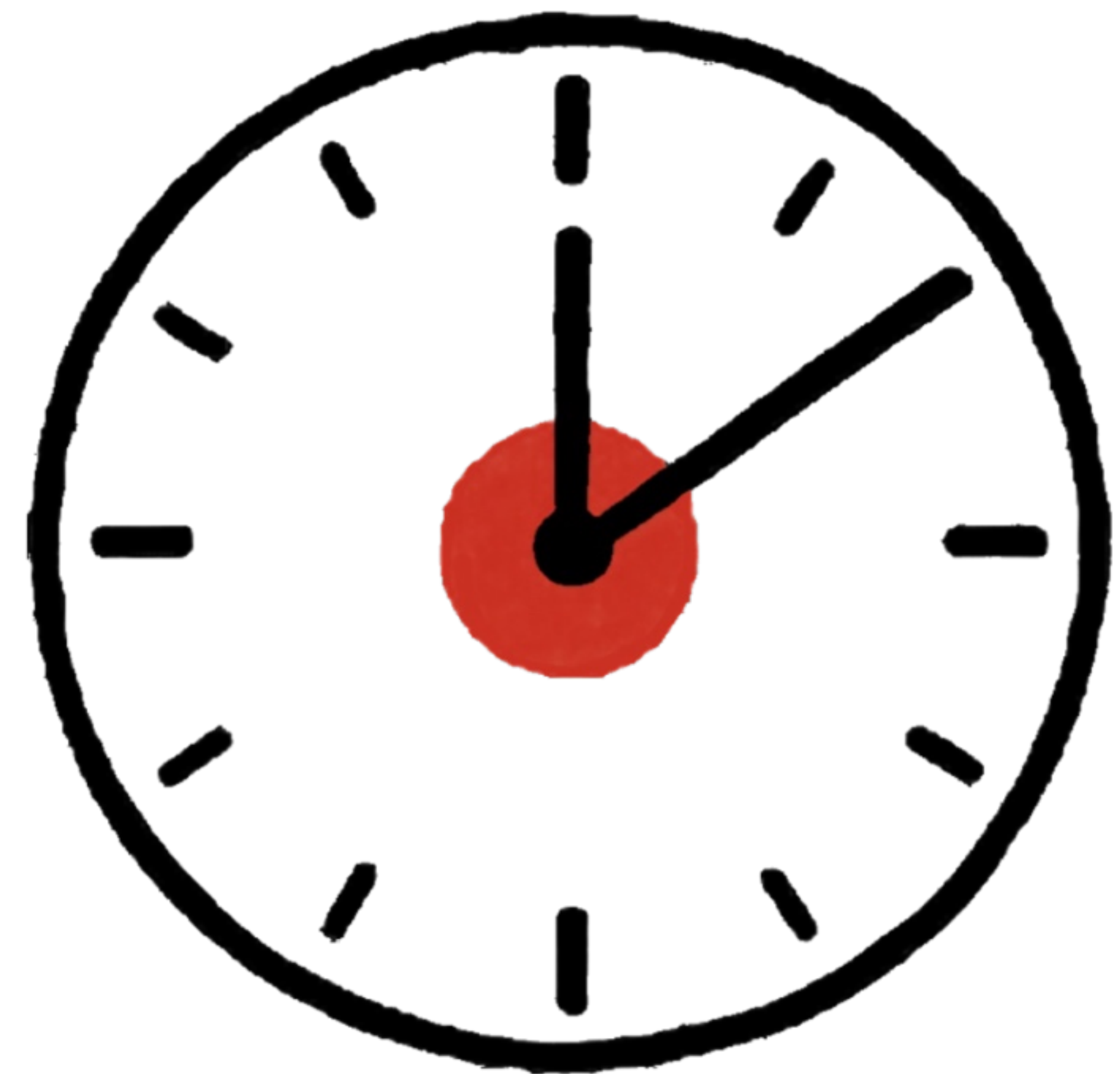
Come
what may

The story interrogates the habits that let institutions declare success while persons languish. When a measure becomes the target, meaning erodes. Reserves accumulate behind locked doors; gratitude is harvested at the ration line; the ledger records fewer funerals while despair deepens. The inverted chart dramatizes this epistemic failure: what looked like declining mortality reads, in truth, as rising, prolonged suffering.

Recognition supplies the ethical center. Persons require more than stabilization; they require acknowledgment as agents and knowers whose accounts of harm set the terms of response. Effective governance treats flourishing as the metric: time unshackled from crisis, food that arrives before collapse, the power to refuse or redesign aid, the freedom to plan beyond the week. Systems worthy of trust build floors, not cliffs; they co-author measures with those governed; they deploy reserves in the present tense.

The Hunger Clock argues for a standard of care that counts lived possibility, not merely continued biology. Progress earns its name when people can do more than endure.

THE HUNGER CLOCK



By Dick Gariepy

It no longer gave her the warm feeling of success, the quiet pride of doing good.

The numbers hadn't changed, but what they represented had. She reached for the chart showing the sharp decline in deaths. Stared at it. Then slowly turned it upside down.

And gasped.

She realized she had been reading it backwards.

It wasn't a triumph over mortality. It was a record of suffering rising, accelerating, unspoken.

She had not measured fewer deaths. She had measured how much agony a body could survive when denied the mercy of release.

A life that does not live, becomes a life of simply not dying..

What she thought was proof of fewer deaths was really a record of longer agony.

Something in her had changed. She had ended death. But she had done nothing to end despair.

The Hunger-Clock continued ticking, day after day, measuring everything except what mattered.

And in that silence, she wondered...

...If her brother had been the lucky one all along.

The end.

The Hunger Clock
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She stared at him.

“They are starving now!” she said.

“What emergency could be worse?”

He looked confused.

"But they're not dying." Then almost in a chuckle as though the scientist had said something funny,

“ your own data shows that everyone's life is better now than before we had the hunger clock, so what does anyone have to complain about anyways?”

The scientist stood silent, a knot tightening in her chest. The minister's words were logical, people were better off with the Clock than without it, freely accepting the grain, preferring it to starvation or worse. The state fulfilled its duty to prevent death, and no one was coerced. Yet something felt profoundly wrong, though she could not yet name why.

The next morning, she walked through a village where no one had perished in five years. No graves, no mourning, just people curled on steps, eyes dull, waiting for just enough to stay alive.

As she watched a mother clutch a meager ration, gratitude masking her gaunt frame, the scientist's unease crystallized. It was possible to wrong someone by benefiting them. The grain kept them alive, but at the cost of a life worth living. This wasn't living. Just people curled on steps, eyes open but dull, waiting for just enough life to stay alive.

That night, she reviewed the survival charts she once clung to. They still showed progress.

But the data looked different now.

The Hunger Clock

In the republic of Raleth, hunger was an old and loyal enemy. It settled quietly, gnawing through bone, stealing children in the night, leaving bodies to bury, and survivors too weak to dig. For generations, rulers failed to tame it. Grain was rationed, fields taxed, people still starved.

Then came a scientist. Young. Brilliant. Earnest. Her brother had died during a lean year. Survivors guilt plagued her every moment,

“Why wasn't he the lucky one to have lived?”

She promised herself she would stop the dying, if not the hunger, then at least the deaths.

She designed the Hunger Clock.

It was a network of precision monitors and threshold algorithms. It measured how close a body was to collapse, weight, electrolytes, blood pressure, pulse. When a citizen neared death, the system dispatched just enough grain to pull them back from the edge.

The death rate plummeted. Resources distributed efficiently enough to save a life without causing their to be significantly less for others. No longer would people lose out on the rest of their life because of a single moment of crisis.

The hunger clock did not solve the massive crop failure problems. But it did mean that they would survive until a solution was found.

Parades were thrown. Charts printed. The scientist was named Protector of the People.

She toured the realm. Gave speeches on humanitarian optimization.

“Hunger cannot be solved overnight,” she said, “but no one must die waiting.”

She did not notice, at first, the changes.

Granary access was reduced. Food subsidies shrank. The food shortage was getting worse, but she was told the agriculture department was nearing a breakthrough, the people just needed to hold on a little longer, and what was the risk? The clock had become so efficient that even in the worst case scenario the majority of the people would survive.

The policy was rational. Efficient. Cost-effective.

And so the people of Raleth began to live at the edge of collapse.

They learned to stop running, to sleep in stillness, to ration effort like breath. Parents taught their children how to look sick enough to trigger aid.

Life became a negotiation with the Clock. And still, the metrics looked good.

Then one day, on a visit to an administrative depot, the scientist stumbled upon a hidden wing, cold, locked, forgotten by all but the guards. Inside were towers of sealed grain.

Tons of food. Enough to feed every village twice over. Enough to erase the Clock.

She demanded an explanation.

“It's a reserve,” the minister replied.

“For the next true emergency.”