

A Labour of Love

I was born with a watch fastened tight to my wrist.

Its measured *tick*,

tick,

ticks,

stirring hourly wails, as I grappled with the weight of inheritance, of currency.

Fast forward two decades and not much has changed. Its white leather and silver a straitjacket; clasping, restraining, as time blurs before me.

Shards of glass lie scattered around me, like tiny granules of stolen time, as the pressure culminates, combusts.

All while phantom chimes ring “it’s too little,

and

you’re too late,” jeering, as I chase seconds down rabbit-shaped burrows. Scrambling, ever further, to grasp at those fragments, force them together, while my watch face too scrambles and falls away from me.

Numbers and lines now indistinguishable, I’m propelled through moments I no longer remember. A young girl materialises, lying idly, watching, while an older woman bustles before her.

Too soon, she disappears, as the tunnel lurches and bends further, tighter, hurtling through channels of endless time, even as the lone woman populates each passing frame.

Her exhaustion emanates through smatterings of days; tireless,

tiring and

tired

as she labours before me.

Pain tears at my heart, as I watch her before me

while shame burns against the icy clasp at my wrist.

This, it appears, is the truth of her days. Days filled with endless labour.

I turn to flee the sight before me, only to find the little girl beckoning me forward, ever so quietly.

“Look,” she whispers, forcing me to face the frame hurtling beside us.

It’s Summer, 2012.

The sweet sonnets of birds sound in the morning air, as that woman, my mother, materialises, handing me a fresh vegemite scroll. Her bone-aching weariness is hidden, tired eyes upturned towards me, she smiles, as I sit before her excitedly. She’s dressed for work, about to leave, and yet still she’d found time to make them for me.

\$20 a scroll really, if time is currency. Yet still there I sat, eating for free.

~~Unearring~~, *Unknowing* of the extent of its fee.

Yet as a child of six, it's no wonder I could not see- she possessed neither time nor currency, I remind myself gently.

Nor rest, nor solace, the very things I bemoan, longingly.

All lost to her restlessness, and to the anticipation of chimes too expensive to miss. Each agonising moment folding into minutes, hours. Each taking and taking until only the residue of mere moments remains, as she sacrifices time, yes, in exchange for currency.

That scroll then, a gift, prepared willingly for me.

Shame sears hotter, searing through the clasp at my wrist as its chimes stutter and clang to the floor.

Startled, the little girl plates her scroll, eyes drawing towards me. She seems to anticipate my shame, even as the burning sensation fails to sound louder than a gasp. "It isn't too late," she whispers, smiling knowingly as she glances towards a frame behind me.

"Go."

I step back, heart clamouring as I race towards it, towards *her*, the scene opening before me.

It's Spring, 2020.

The clock reads three as I rise early, hurrying to find her, lest she start without me.

We fold the scrolls carefully, my mother and I, before hastily parting ways—aching shoulders and calloused hands my toll, as I too exchange time for experience, experience for currency.

The chimes ring and my chest aches, a privilege, not a fee, I remind myself faintly as I too

bustle wearily between frames.

“You’re a lot like her,” they’ll exclaim, as I stand grinning beside her, matching half-moons cushioning our eyes in a rare moment of respite.

I glance down at my calloused hands, tough yet softened, from this labour of love. Love for them, love for me, and most importantly, love for she

without whom, I could not be

certainly *not* with these opportunities,

for she is a miracle woman, really.

I was born with a watch,

fastened tight to my wrist.

Passed down to my mother,

from her mum to me.

Its straps no longer confine,

nor do its chimes induce fear.

Not when we’re together,

scrolls in calloused hands,

twin smiles tired, yet easy.

For it's she whose time opened

these channels for me,

and it's I who'll now benefit,

from her hands to these,

in this *labour of love*.