

'Time Passes'

'1971'

By Samantha Wong

He holds me up against the window, consumed in his own personal fury with the world. My initial impulse is to barter for my life, but at gunpoint, speaking seems the wrong risk to take. One wrong move and I'm a trigger pull away from total and utter regret. With viscous urgency, he orders me to drop to the ground. His lips are thin lines on a harsh canvas, and with each relentless threat, the stench that escapes them burns my skin. Everyone in my sights knows this man's brutal methods. He's intent on utilising fear and twisting it until it can be broken by a bullet to the brain. For once in my life, I have no choice but to sustain what mercy remains in the gunman by not fighting back. Only then could I start to dismiss the rifle, forget my mortality and all at once, my thoughts blur into one. I'm frozen in a split second, and all the while time passes around me, faster than I can allow it to.

The greyness of winter is replaced with the familiar smell of country Victoria in the summertime, and the scent of my mother's subtle perfume and freshly baked apple pie. I slowly begin to piece together that for some logic-defying reason I'm reliving 1971. Up to when I was 10, my adventures comprised of gallivanting down slippery hills and abusing Mrs Abbotsford's cat in rural Warburton. Everyday, I would make my way home from school in a ditch by the side of the road, and wonder why I was somehow inadequate for Casey Morgan, the violin prodigy in the 9th grade.

"Drink, William," I hear my mother say, as she fills a plastic cup with lemonade from her favourite glass jug. The harsh kitchen light outlines the gentle curves in her glowing face, as she stares at me with her deep, blue eyes. "You need to hydrate. You've been playing in the heat all afternoon."

There's a tug on my jacket, and one of my arms is thrust onto a strong pair of shoulders. "I've got you, sir," a voice shouts over the noise. I nod instinctively, because it feels necessary, not because I'm comprehending what he is doing. Then, a searing pain shoots through my leg. I return to the memory.

"Mum, there's someone at the door," I blurt, before sculling the sweet drink. She follows me as I gallop to the door. Mr Arnold, our local postman and the one man who never failed to make me laugh, greets my mother with a smile and a light kiss to her frail hand. "Hello, Jean," he says, and I begin to remember how this memory unfolds.

My mother raised me all by herself, up until she died in the winter of '72. She donned a green scarf around her bare head, and would often express to me how sickness meant she wouldn't be around forever, how she'd have to leave me one undetermined day. She also claimed not to have loved a man after my father left, but every time Mr Arnold visited, I could see her light up the way only people in love could.

"Sir, sir! Can you hear me? He's not responding..."

"You look positively beautiful. Are you ready to go?"

My mother nods keenly, before planting a lingering kiss on my forehead.

"You'll be alright on your own. Mrs Hanson is just next door if-"

Suddenly, hopelessly overwhelmed, I throw myself at her.

"Are you leaving me? Why can't I come with you?"

"William," she sighs, holding my trembling body. "You know I will never really leave you, right?"

I shake my head, refusing to believe.

"Now listen to me: I am your mother. Even when you're old and grey, I will still love you. And even if you don't think everything will turn out alright, just remember how much I, and everyone around you, will love you no matter what."

I stifle a feeble gasp before being pulled from my mother's embrace and drawn back into 2016, realising that despite being struck down by the gunman, I am one of the lucky ones. I've witnessed sieges before, but now I understand a hostage's mentality. You don't focus on fulfilling the selfless act of bravery that will guarantee your name a spot in the history books. You focus on what matters most, and it forces you to reveal what kind of person you truly are.

I am at peace. My mother reminded me how often in my life I had loved and had been loved, and that is enough.

"We have a pulse. He's gonna be alright."

"It'll be alright," I repeat in my mind.

And as it always does, time starts again.