

**Slipstream**  
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She had always felt that she was out of step with other people...

Today the drive was bad, reinforcing her view. The road was twisted around the mountains like the spiral tier of a wedding cake. She struggled to keep her mind following the curves of the road - hurtling along, it always felt too fast past the corner cliffs and cut mountain edges. It was an effort, changing gears, coasting on the brakes, broken only by the approach of oncoming cars that seemed to be more solid and purposeful than herself. The wind blew against the car, hard and fast. It was fierce, rapid as a narrowing tunnel, constricting her focus to the immediate of now.

But here the air was vivid and eucalypt crisp.

Stepping out of the car the cold seemed to etch her face and hands into being. Her eyes and mind opened like wings in the stillness. The ground was moist, dry leaves, twigs and rocks underfoot, slippery with the last rain. Trees were plentiful, straight like white telephone poles, these were the identical replanted saplings after the fire. She heard the bell bird calls, the minor fourths trailing in the trees and the silent gathering of the rosellas wanting food.

"Nothing for you." she said to the nearest rosella landing on her car, a blur of young red and scratchy dark blue. Her voice sounded strange aloud, far different to the dialogue and striving in her head.

There were only a few cars here and she was grateful.

She wandered in the direction of the signs by memory. The ranges here seemed layered with memories, of herself and Angus. This was where they ate with the other cuddle couple, this was where they camped, in her coat was the wrinkled dregs of the map he had given her folded like a rose. But today, when she was here by herself, finally, the memories were only sustained by her. And in the grip of her own personal time they began to wither away, with all their connotations like the unravelling of a cocoon.

*...When you first touched me you grounded me in my body and...it was wonderful to be caught in your moments...the succulent wrenching inside was incredible...afterwards a pure wind was soaring inside like your fingers running under my skin, and you shared my radiant glowing...I...happy to actually be here and be with you and the time flew together...I never thought I would connect with anyone...but you were falling with me through each day*

She remembers when she and Angus made love here, the feel of the stone on her skin, avoiding the leeches. The memory seems only a kiss away, the sweet tug of his bites and the comfort of his freckled shoulder along with the twist inside her body and the dry eyes of alcohol. She can still feel the accompanying swelling in her physical body, echoing distant like a fading photograph...

The heat and him obliterated her sensation of the bush and she liked it at first, feeling his energy living by his days and the minutes of other people. She was buoyed up in a network and she felt for the first time that she kept time with others, and it was nice to share.

Before Angus, people merely passed through her, unawares, like the playing of a long distant movie. She had kept to herself and time wove in and out, like the surprising curves of a beachside road where you could not see the entire coastline because it was tucked into the corners. Then she had met him. They had only known each other for weeks but the sequences of days and nights together condensed that time seemed like months. She thought he was with her then, feeling that they had known each other for a longer time than what he perceived. He was enthusiastic seeing her almost every day, demanding her thoughts wanting to know every aspect of her.

He said time flew around her, and was surprised when hours went by...

She was not.

She was used to being displaced in the folds between events, and was exhilarated that she had found someone that shared it with her. He said there were two kinds of people, those who were always on time or early, and those who could not keep track of time and were always late. She thought that he was the latter, because he put so much into his time, experiencing every moment. There was more in his time, more to do, more to feel. It brought her to life living in his moments.

He smiled and had the drift of content in his voice when he was with her, like the continental drift of her being day after day.

She reached the beginning of the tracks, worn into the park by the ruts of people passing. There were hour estimates for all the landmarks, so to speak, the lookout, the falls, the points where men had declared there was a mountain peak.

Where did they get the estimates for the walks from?

Angus had declared they were for the four wheeled families, with children and grandparents, being able to halve the times himself, plowing through the distances with long legs looking straight ahead. She had kept up with him borne along by his step like a metronome the way she was bound by all his rhythms since she first slept with him.

But she disagreed. For parents the time would have expanded in between the demands of their children. And for the children the time would have gone on forever, like the land seemed to travel for eternity to the horizon when it was uninterrupted flat. The end of the walk would have suddenly come upon them, like an abrupt dip in the road unless their parents had already trained them to the promise of predicting the rise and fall of each hour by minute.

Her parents never did.

She had not known that your parents were supposed to keep time for you and make you punctual.

She savoured the silence before she began to walk, the silence held by the trees and the rocks, the stillness from growing and mutating in the same place season by season. A place where creatures and creepers live and die untouched and undisturbed. The bush was in layers here, with the shells of burnt out trees and new growth springing amongst the old. Nothing was overgrown or concealed, growth existed juxtaposed, the fresh wattle sprayed in buds of yellow amongst eternal acacias. Seasons had gathered in the bush the falling leaves and twigs, into a sink well of force.

Listening to her impulses she started walking...

The reason became apparent as she turned around the bend to encounter a group of people, comfortable and middle aged.

"Hello love." said the men.

The women nodded in identical anoraks.

"Hi." she replied as they brushed past, the surety of their steps knowing that they were finishing their walk, as if tidying up the ends. Later the men and women would describe her as "not completely there" to the ranger. She seemed small to them, although she was their height. Withdrawn, her dark eyes backing away as they went by - a pretty Greek girl in an overlarge parka with gleaming straight black hair.

She hears the chitter chatter of inconsequential comments behind her.

When the people have faded from her hearing, she feels alone, but not lonely. Inside she has become empty and the touch of Angus begins to fade, and the way he shaped her like molten glass. Here away from his demands and the threads of other people's time she feels herself reforming inside like an soft egg, round and balanced.

She becomes aware of hearing running streams over rocks with the scrunch of her footsteps. The track slopes down and stops at the water's edge. She can feel the slippery slide of the black wet rocks under her feet through the soles of her shoes.

Tripping over the roots of the gums she makes her way onto the rocks. Squatting she puts her hands into the shock cold water. It runs over her hands and she can feel through her body the rushing of the river, like running blood through veins.

*...but then the ecstasy faded and became normal, and you ceased to have time for me. I remember waking once from the too tight lock of your arms, you were stressed and you were sandpaper under my hands and to my feelings... my body was so heavy and my eyes dry... the sun was too bright and I wondered if this was really all... night after night...I tried to take you with me but you couldn't let your mind go, couldn't stop fighting, your bitter tinges prevented you from gliding where I could, just following the arc of the sky reflecting in your eyes...*

She became aware of the struggle he had in a cage marked by his expectations. He wanted to avoid days and could not, because he was confined by his resistance which made the bad day unavoidable, a tunnel to pass through before he could reach the other side. His time dragged and it showed in his eyes and hands like bruises. He had become weighted and she realised that she was just an escape for him. She could not

bear him along and float herself, and could not share the splinters he was pushing into her. She began to only feel sorrow for him and nothing else.

The novelty of living day by day, like the inevitable bar chord train track began to wear her down. Only in music or meditation could she slip out between the seconds and she always had to come back. The tick of the watch he had given her became her new pulse. She was punctual once the time kept her, the turning of the hands regulated her moods and movements.

Her hands were white now but she didn't mind.

She stood up to walk again. She clambered onto the rocks in between the ferns on the mosses. Here the wind blew but not like an element to be dealt with, amongst the trees it swayed the tops of the gums from side to side. It did not obstruct where she was going, the movement was merely there. The trees were angle lean on the slope, some stout and broken, shaped by the wind and the subtle shifts in the earth around them. She breathed out feeling her memory dissipate, a conjured phantom that was now excised for good. In its place she was caught by the immensity of her surroundings, the trees that swallowed her, the wilderness caught in the curves of the branches. She was part of the gaia, living all around her, the constraints of calendar time were petty here, rendered powerless.

She wandered amongst the plants, touching the trunks of trees with her hands, brushing the miniature flowers, bright detailed petals glinting from strict twiggy thorns and dry leaves of brushes. Occasionally sun would break into slivers through the lattice cover of the overhanging branches of the elder trees. Sometimes there were animals, scurrying, lizards frozen, once an echidna that curled until she stopped still. Then it unrolled to snuffle away from her, moist and black.

She had found content again, held in something larger than herself. She had no desire to conquer like Angus, using time as stepping stones to reach a goal. She wanted to drift, feeling only the cycles of her body, alone except for the growing inside.

How could she tell him that they had all the time they wanted, that he too could pass through time like a thread through the eye of a needle?

Time was elastic, bound only by how you held each end. She could reach back and rearrange her past memories, moments strung together only by continuity of thought. She could make time stretch, or shorten it with busy work. It was only with him that her time was imposed, his arrival and departure making episodes of the days, the rhythms of their relationship, emotional and physical, shaping time into peaks and troughs like meringue.

She sat down at the base of a tree, legs awkwardly splayed so she would not bend a bush with her presence. She put her hands on her stomach feeling her body swell. She began to itch a little, from the soil and the curious ants on her shoes. Pushing back her hair, it was matted from the wind and damp from the rain. These hours she knew she could concertina out into days. Only seasons mattered here, the big cycles, the little ones of day and night were like the reflex of an eyeblink. Connecting from peak to peak, the cool and the heat her child would be free from time.

Lachesis leant her head against the tree trunk, its brittle red bark giving under pressure. As she closed her eyes she began to cry as the soil turned to dirt and the streams lessened to finally cease.