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Promises of Silver Hair

by Juliet Robinson

Passing a salon, I glance inside at the elderly ladies in for their weekly appointment. I wonder as I step into the road and wind my way through the traffic stilled by a red light, what their lives have been like. They seem so jaded, so small, so normal. And now here in their twilight years they line up for the blue rinses. Not me, I shall wear silver.

I place traditional women in boxes. Bride to be, wife, mother, and grandmother. I mark their value as little; I hold scant regard for these roles, these pigeonholed prisons that women so willingly get confined to.

I promise myself that I shall not chain myself. No ring shall mark ownership of me. No child will grow in my belly. I will never be a wife, mother, or grandmother. This promise is flame-like; it flickers. I square my shoulders and raise my chin. I feel larger than life. I am strong and exalted, I am in my prime, a woman just entering her forties. Still young, but old enough to know my worth.

But one day I shall be older, old.

I re-join the pavement passing two mothers laden with prams. They look tired, but also proud. I glance at one of the pram occupants, a fat fisted boy exploring the wonders of his nose and stifle a snort. I would not be proud if I were his mother.

I pass them and I wonder how I will feel as an old woman, who once made the choice never to have children. Will I have regrets?

I know I will take pleasure in the freedom to grow and live my life, just for me. An unburdened solo life. I already have a good career, I am clever, I am talented, I am creative, and a life lived never having to sideline my own talents is breathtakingly appealing.

I see my future self, beautiful silver hair, a face lined and worn by a life of wonder.

A woman who is proud of her accomplishments. I adore my friends, I have travelled, I have loved, lost, and run headfirst naked into the ocean. I am content, stately, and vigorous.

Having never burdened myself with the shackles of marriage, of motherhood I have turned into something other. A shining free woman. But I sense my future myself is marginalised, pushed to the fringes. People are worried by folk they don't understand.

I frown.

A young couple gaze into a jeweller's window, hands fastened tight. Rings shine in the shop's lights. I can smell their excitement. Fools, why waste their powerful youth? Why bridle it with the manacles of commitment.

But I do understand why. Just as I understand why my envisioned and aspired to older self is marginalised. To men I will be an anomaly, I already am. Not in the shirt and tie club, but also not in the wives and girlfriends one. They will never count me as equal; I will always worry them.

My colleague's partners and wives don't trust me. A lone woman? She can't be content, she must in some way be a threat. Some try to befriend me, in an attempt to know their imagined enemy. Others are just uneasy in my presence.

My friends are shocked by my abject revulsion at the idea of having a family.

'You'll change your mind.'

Nobody understands, they seem utterly determined not to. I worry people. Future me worries people.

Now and then they don't like a strong, self-assured women who is happy.

I wonder about my promise, is it one I can keep? It would be easier to step into the cage of normal, to marry and have a family. A compromise that would bring me into the expected and accepted norms.

But no, I have promised myself silver hair and all the freedoms in between.