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| The Seam  |
| Sci-fi Short Story |
| Tina Gollings  |

For the hundredth time my fingers fondled the edges of a small piece of plastic in my pocket. It may as well have been gold, and Josh still didn’t know it was missing. He couldn’t help me have a baby, but I was determined that he’d help me get off of this dying planet. I emptied my bottle and scratched at the government warning about drinking alcohol when pregnant. Why did they even bother with those anymore? The label was stubborn, but I finally tore it off and left it on the street behind me.

 Our apartment was nestled on the top floor of the bio dome wall and had a magnificent view of the bleak but beautiful fields below. I often wondered that such a striking landscape could be so toxic. I entered silently, Josh relaxed on the couch watching the news. A lady in Brooklyn was pregnant and the last wormhole shuttles were scheduled for tomorrow. I didn’t bother asking if the pregnant lady was one of his patients.

“Malia! I thought maybe you weren’t coming home.” He grabbed my arm, “Where’ve you been?”

“What do you care? You’re leaving me tomorrow.” I yanked back my arm.

“Don’t waste our last night being mad when you know there’s nothing I can do to get you on the shuttles.”

“If you loved me Josh, you’d find a way. You of all people could have found a way.”

He didn’t know it, but I had a plan to be on one of those wormhole shuttles tomorrow, with or without his help. Doctor Josh, the fertility expert, gets to leave earth so why shouldn’t I? Wasn’t my life worth saving too? I locked him out of our room.

“I did all I could to help you get pregnant!” he yelled through the door. He was cruel to leave me here. I threw a shoe at the place where I imagined his head.

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 Most experts say the time event will be sudden. The fabric of time was stretching thinner by the day and could tear at any moment. Less reputable scientists say we’ve got another million years until it gives. The elasticity of space time is a tricky thing to gauge. I for one was not willing to be spit out the other side of a black hole for the pleasure of someone else’s universe. Lately, I’d lived my life too much for someone else’s pleasure.

The sun rose pink and pretty. I knew I could be looking at the last sunrise earth ever sees, and if all went as planned today, it *would* be the last one I’d ever see. I didn’t take the sunrise for granted anymore. This universe had no fondness for beauty, only a taste for destruction. What kind of God would want to silence a sunrise like this one? I turned from the window. I’d had enough, I wanted a new universe.

Josh left before I woke. I couldn’t believe he didn’t try to smooth it over with me first. He didn’t care now. He’d been distant for months. How can you stay attached to someone you know has no part in your future? I’m as good as dead to him, a living reminder of an already extinct existence. Or maybe that wasn’t it at all; maybe he knew the badge was missing? He could be waiting for me at the shuttles right now, glancing at the gates to see if I’d come yet.

 I sat on the bed and pulled hard on my pleather pants. “God, these are hard to get on today.” I wriggled on the bed until my pants obeyed, then turned to the mirror to check the seam in the back. The stitching struggled to stay together. I worried they might rip, but they looked good so I didn’t care. After all, they were Josh’s favorite pants.

I imagined the moment when the elastic matrix of time wouldn’t stretch anymore and promised myself that I wouldn’t be around when it gives. Time only needed to keep on stretching for one more day. The shuttles were docked outside the Museum District, which was perfect since I needed to stop there first anyway, just in case my ticket needed extra persuasion.

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Outside the bio-dome gates a gritty wind pelted my cheek. The old world was dusty and sterile. I lowered the face protector on my hood. The Museum District wasn’t far and the tall old buildings there offered protection from the biting wind. No one really lived in the Museum District anymore. Only people making a buck off tourists and a few whackos trying to relive the supposed ‘romance of the past’ while conveniently forgetting its evils. My eyes rolled. I couldn’t find anything romantic in the old twenty first century cities. After all, the same people that built those cities were responsible for the cocktail of chemicals that ended human fertility.

A woman out walking her dog stood engrossed in some antique Chinese abortion propaganda from the one-child policy days. Our eyes met. My clinging pants and the plastic badge in my pocket made me feel friendlier than usual. So, I stopped to watch a screen with her. The Museum District streets were lined with themed displays like these.

On the screen an unhappy woman spoke with a doctor, she patted her bloated belly. Next a woman’s pregnant torso in silhouette, where a little spec of light leaves the womb and the torso becomes thin. Now the woman from the first scene is shown thin and happy as she plays tennis with a male friend. I’d seen this one before. The woman leaned in for conversation. On a whim, I decided to engage with her. I still had time.

“Unbelievable savagery!” She said. “Can you believe that people used to think there were too many people on the planet?”

 “Yeah, it’s hard to believe. But that was a different time; we can’t judge them by the standards of our own circumstances.”

“Hmm, I suppose you’re right.”

 Dramatic music from the screen interrupted our conversation. The display now read, ‘*Life is in an endangered state, rare in a universe full of frozen and fiery rocks. Let us protect and respect life at all cost in these enlightened times*.’

 “Maybe we’ll be able to avoid the mistakes of our ancestors on the other side of the wormhole,” I said as I gave her dog a pat on the head.

The woman pointed at me, “Oh, you’re one of *those*!”

I winced. Here we go…

“You think the time event is going to be sudden!”

The heat inside my clothes searched for escape and found none.

“You know,” she continued, “The projections all say it’s happening slowly by degrees. We’ve got plenty of time before time rips. Some even say it could stretch on forever.”

“Well, at least we can agree that time *is* stretching…”

 If tomorrow was as certain as the sunrise I could have humored her, but time was scarce and all of it borrowed. I’d no patience for those who squandered their share of it. They deserved their fate.

 “Look,” I said, “Someday time won’t be able to stretch anymore and I’m not going to be here when that happens. Enjoy the rest of your life, however long or short it is.” I didn’t wait for her reply.

 “It’s gradual!” She shouted after me. “You don’t have anything to worry about!” Her words were the opposite of comfort.

I rounded a corner and left the time event denier to ponder her stupidity. She could stay in that part of the Museum District, her backward ideas belonged there. Even if she did come around to the truth it would be too late. The last shuttles were leaving today and she obviously had nothing to offer the colony on the far side of the wormhole.

My determination strengthened when the firearm quarter finally came into view. I strolled past a row of gun-themed street displays and stepped into a building that carried my last name in large gold letters above its double doors:

 “G\*L\*O\*C\*K.”

The receptionist was new. She asked if I’d like an audio tour.

“No thanks,” I said, “Is Larry here? I’m Malia Glock. I’m here to claim an exhibit that’s been on loan.” I took a breath, “I’m taking my exhibit to the other side of the wormhole for posterity…you know, in case time rips.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the woman. She fidgeted with the stylus in her hand. “Umm, Larry isn’t here…”

“That’s ok,” I said. I knew Larry wouldn’t be there today.

“I have the ‘Relics on Loan Removal Form,’ Larry signed it yesterday.” I gloated internally as I placed the convincing document on her desk.

“My exhibit is filed in the archives. If you take me up, I can unlock the safe,” I flashed the chip on my wrist as proof.

“Well, ok...” She frowned as she glanced over the form, “I guess everything looks good.”

We made small talk in the elevator. My unwitting accomplice eyed my tight pants several times as we spoke. These aren’t for you, I thought, but I was happy that she found the tight pleather so distracting. I hoped they would have the same effect on Josh over at the shuttles. Seam, don’t fail me now. I glanced at my watch again.

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The Glock Building disappeared behind me. Surely the rest would be easy. I took the badge out of my pocket and carefully placed it around my neck. The gun in my bag comforted me as I pushed past the crowds gathering to watch the last shuttles fly.

Some held signs that read, “The Time Event is a Lie.” Other signs showed pregnant silhouettes with the words “Earth Needs You,” written over them. I spotted Josh across the tarmac in his white lab coat, helping a woman up some shuttle stairs. My heart skipped a beat. I wondered if he expected me.

The guard at the gate stood a head taller than most of the people in the crowd. I slowed as I approached him. The Glock was no match for his high-tech crowd-control gun. My hand shook a little as I offered up the badge for scanning. He looked me over with narrowed eyes and took it from me. A musical series of beeps from the security scanner gave me the green light. Today I had all the right kinds of distractions.

“Get out of the way!” My escort yelled at the crowd. “We have a pregnant woman here! You’ll be alright Miss. They’ll have a special cabin waiting for you.” People in the crowd pleaded for me to stay as the guard led me on towards the shuttles. So this is what it felt like to be treated like you can carry a baby. The guard unlocked the last gate and let me through.

“Thank you, sir.” I tried to sound fragile, “I just want the best chance for my little one.” I patted my barren, lifeless womb and waved good bye. My heart beat wildly as I neared the shuttle where Josh waited to receive his next patient.

 “Malia? What are you doing here?”

He hadn’t expected me after all. My hand quietly found the gun in my bag.

“Hi Josh, nice to see you too. I’m getting on the shuttle.”

 I flashed the badge I’d stolen from him and calmly tried to push past him up the shuttle steps. He pulled me back. I wiped a lock of hair off my face and pushed it behind an ear.

Josh was stern, “Malia, you can’t get on this shuttle. You know as well as I do that you can’t have babies.”

I swallowed my emotion. He was wrong. A new universe waited for me on the other side of the wormhole, one with a God who didn’t want to silence rosy-pink sunrises and render life extinct. If I could just get through the wormhole I knew I’d be able to carry a baby there.

“Maybe if you cared about *us* as much as you care about your work, we would have our own baby by now,” I said. His eyes hardened, this wasn’t working.

“I love you Josh…I wore your favorite pants. There are other things that women are good for besides having babies.”

He pulled away from me.

“This is beneath you, Malia.”

“Time is tearing Josh and I have a right to survive just the same as any fertile woman does. If you leave me here, I’m dead. You didn’t even say goodbye this morning.” My eyes moistened. We stood face to face, but now my Glock pressed into his side.

He glanced down at it. “Malia, don’t do this.”

Now that he too faced death, he understood me. I could see it in his eyes. Hard to tell who had used who, but there was no love between us now, only instinct and a gun.

We fought for the Glock, for the right to live. Our struggle strained the seam and the fabric finally tore apart. I ignored the draft and let the tears and adrenaline flow. The rip set time loose in a moment that contained all of eternity. Every possibility blossomed at once into being. No sudden burst of noise or flash of incomprehensible energy accompanied the tear. Instead, the warm breeze of unfettered time rippled past the Glock Building, past the woman in the Museum District and past the dusty sterile wind that blew outside the bio-dome.

The sun rose pink and pretty. Josh came in to kiss me good morning. I caught the scent of his breath, always fresh, I loved that about him. He drew up my night shirt and kissed my round belly. The baby kicked in response and we laughed. Outside, the clouds frosted themselves with rose, such a breathtaking sky. God must have enjoyed painting it.

**Author’s Reflection**

Did you know that time is a *thing*? Somehow, time is mysteriously linked to space, forming a stage for life and matter to interact on. Time is not as absolute as we like to imagine, nor as immoveable as we take it to be. So, what would happen if the fabric of time tore? This is the situation in which Malia Glock finds herself. Unable to get pregnant, she is declined ridership on the last wormhole shuttles out of a dying universe. While time persists, each second that passes is a precious moment of life gone forever, hurling Malia towards the certainty of death. Like Malia, we are all fettered by time, imprisoned by it’s scarcity. Only, what would existence look like if the fetters came off and time, as we understand it, was lost forever? Malia is about to find out.