

Sunlight

The sun shimmered so brightly that I had to cover my eyes with my sleeve. Taking a stroll in the park, I tried to clear out some of my thoughts that kept bugging me all day. People always chose what they thought was right for me. ‘No, you can’t do this, you’re too young’ or ‘You? Do this? You’re so small, you look only like ten years old!’. But not long after that, I was mesmerised by an alluring hourglass near the playground, the sand slowly flowing down to the opposite identical bulb. Unable to contain my curiosity, I picked it up and flipped it over.

I hear the flowing sand transition from one side to the other. My surrounding blurs and I feel like I’m dreaming as I see ocean blue swirls in front of me. Suddenly, I open my eyes and I’ve returned to my younger years when I was a baby. When I cry, tears well up inside me and cascades down my face. My parents come rushing towards me and treats me like I’m the emperor. When I feel lonely, I feel like all of the familiar faces distort and blur, and I’m left alone. I want to say something, I want to feel the warmth that my parents give me and the comfort that I need, but something’s choking me and trying to stop me from shouting. The itchiness of teething crawls on my gums like a million of ants in my mouth.

Like a blink of an eye, I turned five years old. My schoolbag’s heavy, and I trip and scrape my knee on my sensitive skin. The pain burns my knee as air sweeps it and the wound stings even more. The sight of seeing my vermilion flesh naked without my skin to protect it looks horrific. But when I cry, my parents embrace me with their arms and surrounds me like a blanket, shielding me from dangers. My parents always let me win in every game I challenge them to. They shower me with compliments, brightening up my day even when storm clouds appear to ruin it.

But after what felt like a few seconds, I’m suddenly ten years old. I work diligently when I am in school and I love learning. But my favourite subject is art. The swish of pencils scratching onto smooth, blank paper. Paper that has potential. Paper that can be turned into anything with just some imagination. The vibrant colours splash onto the canvas - turning it from bland to beautiful, with no rules or restrictions on what you can do. It’s just you and your imagination - no hard decisions and no conflicts. I complain when I do my homework and instead spend my mornings staring out the window, I notice the intricate colours, the shape and design of everything and I listen to the background sounds. Calm, crowded, colourful. My friends applaud me when I do something smart, and it makes me feel superior, and more appreciated.

Now, I see the hourglass again, but the grains of sand have slightly evened out. It was enjoyable experiencing my younger years, I didn't notice how parents are more carefree at your actions and how much attention you get when you're young, as well as the challenges that you have to face when you don't know how to deal with the problems that you find hard independently. The way how sensitive your feelings are and how much comfort you need to truly feel safe as a child. I flip the hourglass once more.

The sound of streaming sand flows smoothly once again, this time more faster than before. The swirls have now transformed into pine forest green and I soon find that I'm a teenager. I try so hard to blend in when I'm in high school, but deep down, I know I am very different to others. The stress of submitting tasks and friendship dramas is almost too much, as if something is engulfing me, and I can't escape from it. When I argue with my parents, I feel the ground rumble, and my heart beat faster, sweat running down my forehead and I hear my voice crack. I'm angry, that they don't hear what I'm saying, that they don't understand my thoughts, that they don't know what I need from them.

But before I know it, I'm sixteen and about to get my driver's license for more convenient travel. To pay for a car, and school materials has a big burden on our family budget, especially when bills are high. I try to look tough but inside, I'm succumbing to the crumbling of the overpowering force of many different things I have to do. I try my best to study hard and get all the answers right, yet when I get an easy question wrong, I get teased and bullied. It feels like the world's against me and everything I do. But despite this, I still have my happy times when I have friends and family that care for me and love me no matter what, holding up a torch in a dark tunnel, and blowing the clouds away so the sun shines on me.

Soon enough, it's all over and I see the hourglass for the second time, and the sand is now properly even. It was equally exciting to be experiencing the life of a teenager - outside they look grown-up, calm and collected. But inside, they're no bigger than a small child, sometimes getting crushed by weights of many different tasks they have to juggle. I flip the hourglass once more .

The delicate, smooth sand runs down and soft, caramel yellow swirls appear in front of me. My body shifts again and soon I'm an adult, refined and responsible. The heavy burden that I carry everyday - to keep track of bills, keys and my family and friends' happiness and safety is hard to handle. I hold up the house continuously and the responsibility that I have to do almost everything is too much. I struggle to accept help, because I've been relying on myself for constant years and learnt how to do things independently, but

when I do, everything is easier. As an adult, I don't have a moment of having nothing to do. As an adult, being bored is luxurious. When I come back from the office, my body aches, my head throbs and I forget what I need to do next for work, like everything is spilling out. I would love nothing more than to just sit on the sofa. But when I see my family - happy, carefree and excited to see me, I feel like my heart grows wings and starts to fly. They're depending on me, and I can't forget it.

The hourglass appears again, and the sand is somewhat leaning towards one bulb compared to other. Being an adult was fun, even though you had to have a lot of responsibility, but lots of other people counted on you and appreciated what you did to help them. I flip the hourglass for the third time.

The last few grains of sand flow for the last time and delicate ruby red swirls emerge in front of my eyes. As time went by, my body started to grow older, as I started to enter elderhood. Bumpy wrinkles started to appear everywhere, dragging my face along with it. It feels like time slows down as I notice all the little things around me - the delicate but echoing chirps of birds, the swaying leaves of trees, the joyful faces on others. I have nothing to worry about. My kids all grown-up and independent, no more work to stress about. All the mistakes and regret from past moments still bubble inside me once in a while, but I learn to let it go and understand that everyone makes mistakes. It doesn't matter now. But my body continues to grow older, my vulnerability to sickness grows stronger, and illness starts to take over. Suddenly my mind starts to fade...

The fog clears from my mind as I perceive the hourglass again. There's barely any grain of sand left on the upper bulb. The final grain of sand touches the opposite bulb, and the hourglass vanishes. As I return back to my original life, I know now that while I can't do certain things in the present, I can learn to do it in the future. The difference between child and adult - is that innocent becomes independent. Whereas teenager and the elderly - are perturbed and peaceful. Each stage I felt bloomed like colours of the rainbow inside and while they may not always stay the same, the feeling and painted image is still there. Life is wonderful, and life is colourful. Experiencing different struggles and wishes, and memories throughout each part of my life made me realise something.

Life is like sunlight. Colourless at a glance, colourful through lenses.