**Poems by HE KM Isaac**

**The pursuit**

How much stuff must one accumulate   
in pursuit of fulfilment   
before the quest leads to emptiness;  
before one understands   
that happiness is not a destination but a journey.  
  
How many hours must one race with the clocks, hit the pavement,   
and postpone promises before one recognises   
that tomorrow will always stay a day ahead?  
  
How long do you think tender moments will stick around to soothe you

when you matter less at the office, amongst erstwhile friends, in prized social circles,  
and are subbed off the great pitch of life; replaced by youthful experience?  
  
How much family time would have been sacrificed,  
soft playtime missed, laughter foregone, dinners cancelled,   
birthday parties forfeited.  
Which anniversaries might we have forgotten, movie nights cut short or holidays put off in the pursuit... for the bigger, more expensive car;   
to tame the latest trends;    
compete with boastful neighbours and friends  
instead of enjoying the love in your children's eyes.  
  
How many pairs of shoes still line the closet floor, looking up at branded clothes - new, but never worn; and how much money did we say was enough

before we started to treat and pamper ourselves.   
  
Remember when the house was too clean to host birthday parties;   
when you feared doodles and wild scratches on the walls,  
built-in stains nesting on the white sofas?  
Well, today, only that intrusive silence fills the air,

and like loneliness, it lingers.   
  
No doubt, you long for those familiar unscripted sounds

to drown the monotone voices in your head,

but the children are now grown up.  
They, too, are busy living lives like us.

We taught them well.  
  
There might be some money still in the bank for medical bills and nursing homes.  
Loads of extra time, now, which you can't use.   
Baskets of memories swinging in the wind, but the mind is too frail to recall them.   
Tomorrow became today, and today became tomorrow while you chased shadows.  
  
The fancy car sits idle. The phone hardly rings.  
And you stand around staring deep into the face of life's rear view mirrors,  
hoping to retrieve moments lost. But alas! It's far too late!

**Smiles for my daughter**

I smile for my daughter   
because her brows form gentle frowns if they think I am sad.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
to extinguish tears from her eyes when molehills sprout mountains.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
to support all daughters who face abuse and discrimination.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
to plant ladders for her to climb and to remember she can tame the sky.  
  
I smile for my daughter to silence invisible giant monsters   
that steal sleep from her eyes.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
when she showers me with hugs, kisses and I love yous, just because.   
  
I smile for my daughter   
because she studies my face for life-lessons in confidence and self-belief.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
because her smiles are reflected in the mirror my face has become.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
because she scours my moods for emotional reference points.  
  
I smile for my daughter  
to remind myself always that childhood lasts a lifetime.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
to make her smiles smile longer and to bring smiles to my own face.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
because my love is unconditional and will always stand by her.  
  
I smile for my daughter   
to remind her that even in adversity she is the master of her face.  
  
I smile for my daughter  
Just because...

**Extra time**

Always thought there'd be time  
to drink mocktails over stories and share hearty laughs.  
Time to sit in the shade of coconut trees and sip lemonade to the tune of sea breezes.  
Time, maybe to take long twilight walks on the beach and build sand castles with our toes.  
  
Just assumed there'd always be time to enjoy the quieter moments;  
to munch on croque monsieur and stroll dimly lit promenades  
to watch dreams inscribe our names on parked benches.  
Thought there'd be time for casual drives to nowhere to explore secret floral gems,

lie in tall grass and talk for hours without words.  
  
Hoped there'd be time to spend more time soaking up the sun, dodging mid-afternoon rain;  
hugging brash breezes escaping the sea to hatch closeness.   
Time to count tender raindrops swinging on leaves;  
or to sing lullabies to your eyes and watch them laugh and fall asleep.  
Thought there'd always be tomorrows, because time was so young, energetic and optimistic.  
  
Felt sure there'd be time enough  
to buy you flowers; play board games after dark; rewind yesterday's dreams tomorrow   
as new favourite movies.  
Time to gift you secret places to cast off your cares and watch time take its time to grow up.  
  
Never occurred to me   
time would evaporate without warning and lose its voice.  
Never imagined it like this, when there is so much left to be said;  
so much laughter still to be laughed and so many more smiles to smile tomorrow.  
  
Hard to believe this is it. The end!  
Can it be? There must be more time! Time to share thoughts that count.  
Time to take time and make time for more than words.  
Time to watch hands hold hands as conversations take walks together.  
  
Just imagined there'd always be time to make lasting memories   
and to lock them away in time vaults for safekeeping.   
Never thought time would fall asleep; and create such unquenchable silence and emptiness.  
Tomorrow always seemed to be one wish away...  
Just wanted a bit more time,   
enough time; to talk, laugh, remember and share more of what matter  
without ever having to know regret.

**Before you go**

Before you go  
bow your head in quiet prayer  
and listen for the choruses of whispered anguish

screaming for your attention.   
  
Before you go  
spare a thought for those of us still in need.  
Say a quick prayer for those praying bountifully   
for miracles and scarce blessings.  
Remember those of us

desperate and longing to harvest second chances    
to irrigate the parched roots of our lives.  
  
Before you go  
keep praying fresh prayers for lost ambition,  
for those suffocating, disgruntled and in tears;  
for those scavenging the darkened alleyways of despair

in search of something better.  
Spare a moment   
for the mouths wont to suffer  
yet too disillusioned to try  
and too anhedonic to mint more tears.  
  
Before you go  
try to fix yesterday’s pain;   
and redress the tiresome wrongs   
before they seep into tomorrow's future.  
And remember to say a word for those

too often orphaned by justice;  
let down and too easily forgotten.  
  
Before you go  
comfort those looking to attain the unattainable

and give them hope.  
Pray that your prayers become ladders for their voices to climb  
and turn aspirations into faith.  
  
But, before you go,  
take a long look at the unfinished dreams

you leave behind.  
and ask yourself...  
if this is really the time to leave.

**Close to home**

Another name...  
Another announcement.  
More grub for curious, careless whispers.   
But this one is not a cold, indifferent statistic;  
no longer an impersonal, invisible war.  
It has now claimed familiar soldiers.  
  
It bears a friendly face;  
with an unscheduled goodbye...  
It triggers sudden races to recall lost moments,

last conversations, and postponed plans.  
  
Where are the warriors as this battle rages on?   
Are they negotiating our surrender or fighting the good fight  
for those who stay behind to hang more pearls

to the strings of tears growing in halls of pain?  
Where are the folks like us who we knew personally, intimately?  
Where are the faces who made memories, knew dreams, and brimmed with life?  
  
Maybe, in time,

we can regroup and recover special moments.  
Maybe in time,

when the tears finally settle;  
they'll submerge and soothe the scars in baths of healing   
from which sullen spirits soar.  
Perhaps in time,  
hearts are revived and hardened until they mend.  
And even stubborn pain,  
no matter how deep - morphs naturally into the mind's woodwork.  
Perhaps in time,   
we might learn to live without cherished memories for company.  
Maybe, in time  
we might recover, even without quite knowing

if we are whole or just residual patchworks   
of embroidered nuances contrived to appease our soul's doubts.  
  
Until that moment;  
should our emotional firewall hold;  
and we can beat anguish

into protective shields and ploughshares,  
let's spare a moment   
for those faces without names  
memorialised anonymously   
and remember

they too were faces that hit close to home...

**A vessel**

Lord, please make me

A vessel for the world…

Lift me up in moments darkened by despair

When galloping anxieties plough

The unsettled oceans of my mind like reckless warriors

Transform me into a compass

And point me to dry lands

Dear Lord!

Steady my vessel with courage

To endure torrential waves of doubt

Keep me resolute in days greyed with pain

And on course like a beacon shining warmth

For the world

Lord, please steel me

Make me into that unflinching shoulder

Of support and comfort for those in need

Blind my mind, dear Lord, to bitterness

But open to the magnificence of the heart

Help me

Amidst the frailties and imperfections of this life

To love permanently without judgement

With compassion to all

Strengthen me

To resist my common vanity

To walk in my brothers shoes

And understand my sisters’ voice

Let me always see them in me as me

And never abandon them

For their failures and successes are my own

I am their keeper

Dear Lord, I ask you

To make me a vessel

Build me from the metal of my children’s hearts

And the innocence of their eyes

Teach me to forgive

To embrace kindness and truth

Fortify my heart, dear Lord

To be that vessel in your image

And your message

To be a candle for the world

**Wishes by the water’s edge**

Sit here and rest a while.  
Take a moment.   
Have a few mouthfuls of spring  
to your heart's content.   
Hear the ripples on the water   
kiss the wind and wave to migrating birds.  
Quiet your mind until it falls asleep slightly awake.  
Then, watch the air stroll quietly and stroke your face.  
  
Sit here and rest a while.   
Let this shy sun marinate   
your thoughts and hold you close.  
Close your eyes.  
Feel the silence massage you secretly   
in plain sight.  
Let it tease my fingers   
until they find you.  
  
Sit here and rest a while.  
No need to talk out loud.  
Just lay your head on my shoulder.  
Palm in palm, thoughts to thoughts and listen.   
The silence wants to share and speak volumes.  
Take a deep breath and wait  
for your heart to tell its own stories.  
  
Sit here and rest a while.  
Allow desire to dream, just a little.  
Let your heart delight in the sounds, whispered like shards of daylight.   
Listen as memories skim the water's edge like melodies   
while wishes hum and pray for time.  
  
Sit here and rest a while.  
Together.  
No rush. No expectations. No demands  
Just hold me close on the water's edge until I feel whole.   
I am home.  
Ready to take you in,   
moment by moment, bit by bit.  
Completely.   
There's still time before sunset.

**A Paper Cup**

Do not be distressed

when your opinions no longer matter

and your cherished words

fail to harvest attention like before.

Do not let unhappiness find you,

if the cameras no longer care enough,

they refuse to search for your face,

flatter your ego

or beat a path to your door.

Do not feel abandoned

when that forever inconvenient phone you avoided

– stops ringing –

and the copious friendships you cultivated and prized,

steadily evaporate.

Be careful not to court disappointment

when the cautious adulation stops,

the beloved accolades dissolve

and you quietly become yesterday’s news

– even as you lie awake

struggling to recover misplaced opportunities.

Try not to cuddle sadness

even if your name ceases

to roll off the lips of former devotees –

and the lofty titles you sported proudly,

like fierce battle scars,

can no longer shield you

from the isolation of mistrust.

Dare not take offence

when they decline to open doors for you,

and to obey your commands;

but instead, forget your birthdays

and rarely,

someone mistakes you for somebody important.

Try as you must,

not to feel bitter.

Simply, cast a smile at the mislaid years

and remember…

it was always temporary

and

you were always

just a paper cup.

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