

POETRY | FALL 2021

Tick-Tock

By Sophia Wilson

The tick-tock knock of one hundred clocks, the chime of nothing lasting...

A white-whiskered man is bent over a cold marble clock face. Collections of keys: wrought iron, brass—he knows the inside and out of their fitting.

A wife is bent over her embroidery frame. Stitches depict a circle of village life—chickens, pigs, children. She is patient, accustomed to shadows, the dim lounge, the pervasive presence of clocks—the husband’s habitual manner of avoiding her.

She polishes, cleans, and cooks, refrains from being wound up, unlike the clocks, by the husband’s obsession—or the cacophony of chimes on the quarter-hour, the ejecting cuckoos, and small costumed figures.

He examines the anatomy of clockwork mistresses. Dust settles. The brass and silver return to tarnished states.

The tick-tock hours cannot be kept at bay, nor the tick-tock of decay.

A chink of light slips in, casting shafts on an aged carpet. The wife looks up and sees daylilies at the window. They are brilliant gold beneath a yellow disc of sun.

Long-life flowers, she tells herself. *Winter will soon bring withering*. She goes outside and gathers the flowers. How delicate they are. How uplifting—unlike the silent husband and the oppressive stance of his grandfather clock.

She inhales deeply, visualizes the sinister weed growing in her belly, and permits herself to imagine that a miracle will deliver more time.

Sophia Wilson is a writer whose work has appeared in publications including *Australian Poetry Anthology*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Blackmail Press*, *Not Very Quiet*, *Mayhem*, *Landfall* and *Bestmicrofiction 2021*. Her poetry was recognized recently in the Kathleen Grattan Prize, the Robert Burns Poetry Competition, the Hippocrates Prize and the Caselberg Trust International Poetry Prize. She lives in New Zealand with her partner and three Eurasian daughters.
