

The Price of Admission

A tragedy in several unnecessary procedures.

By Laura Maria Fetz

Dramatis Personae

WOMAN, wishing to enter the world

BEAUTY, keeper of the door

TIME, carrying an hourglass

MONEY, carrying considerably less than before

SOCIETY, heard mostly from offstage

ACT I: THE DOOR

[WOMAN approaches a door marked SOCIETY.]

WOMAN: I should like to enter.

BEAUTY: Of course.

[Pause.]

WOMAN: Then why are you blocking the door?

BEAUTY: Your face.

WOMAN: What about it?

BEAUTY: You brought the original.

WOMAN: I was under the impression it was mine.

BEAUTY: It is. That's the problem.

[BEAUTY produces mascara.]

BEAUTY: We can improve it.

MONEY: How much?

BEAUTY: €29.99.

TIME: And twelve minutes.

WOMAN: I don't need mascara to work.

BEAUTY: Certainly not.

WOMAN: So I may enter without it?

BEAUTY: Certainly.

[BEAUTY steps aside. SOCIETY whispers: "She looks tired."]

WOMAN: Give me the mascara.

ACT II: AN OLD ARRANGEMENT

WOMAN: Who made these rules?

BEAUTY: Oh, they're very old.

Once, men possessed most of the land, professions, money and political power. This made their preferences rather consequential.

A woman's beauty could influence whom she married, the status she acquired and therefore, sometimes, the life she lived.

WOMAN: So men invented beauty?

BEAUTY: Don't be childish. Nobody invented beauty.

Power merely made some people's opinions of it more expensive than others.

Consider jewellery.

Gold made a woman beautiful. Conveniently, it also gave her something valuable she could carry and sell.

MONEY: Portable capital.

BEAUTY: Precisely. no

WOMAN: So if they wouldn't give her the bank account—

BEAUTY: She was wise to keep the necklace.

ACT III: PROGRESS

WOMAN: But things have changed.

BEAUTY: Immensely!

Women have property now. Careers. Bank accounts. Political power.

We no longer need to decorate them with capital.

WOMAN: Wonderful.

BEAUTY: So we decorate the woman.

[Enter a procession: FOUNDATION, SERUM, DIET, HAIR DYE, BOTOX and SURGERY.]

BEAUTY: Longer lashes. Smaller waist. Fuller lips. Smoother skin. Fewer wrinkles.

WOMAN: When am I finished?

[Everyone laughs.]

BEAUTY: Finished?

My dear, you age.

ACT IV: THE BILL

MONEY: I object.

BEAUTY: Noted.

TIME: As do I.

BEAUTY: Nobody invited you.

TIME: You take me anyway.

[Silence.]

TIME: Five minutes here. Forty there. Hair. Makeup. Shopping. Appointments. Diets. Procedures.

An hour may be small.

But an hour cannot be spent twice.

WOMAN: Meaning?

TIME: The hour you give Beauty cannot also be given to study, work, art, politics, sleep—

MONEY: —or me.

BEAUTY: How dramatic.

TIME: We are in a tragedy.

ACT V: THE CHOICE

WOMAN: Then I'll stop.

BEAUTY: You are completely free to do so.

WOMAN: No makeup?

BEAUTY: Your choice.

WOMAN: No dieting?

BEAUTY: Your body.

WOMAN: No Botox?

BEAUTY: I would never dream of forcing you.

WOMAN: Then I am free.

BEAUTY: Entirely.

[WOMAN approaches the door.]

SOCIETY, offstage: She looks tired.

Another voice: She's let herself go.

Another: Not very professional.

Another: She used to be pretty.

[WOMAN stops.]

BEAUTY: You see? No force whatsoever.

EPILOGUE

WOMAN: Then wearing makeup is anti-feminist?

BEAUTY: That would make things wonderfully simple.

WOMAN: It isn't?

BEAUTY: If the world rewards beauty, pursuing beauty may be perfectly rational. Your private advantage and women's collective advantage need not be the same thing. That is the joke.

WOMAN: I don't find it funny.

BEAUTY: It's Shakespearean.

[TIME turns over the hourglass.]

WOMAN: What does beauty cost?

MONEY: More than yesterday.

TIME: More than money.

WOMAN: And who receives the payment?

[BEAUTY opens the door.]

BEAUTY: You're late.

[WOMAN looks at the door, then at the audience.]

WOMAN: Of course I am.

[Exeunt.]

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