

## Eternity in an Hour

By Mohammad Khan

I'm walking down the busy city sidewalk. My head aches from the constant stimulation. News boards flash 24/7 making it difficult to sleep at night. Advertisements competing for my attention when I can barely focus already. With everything to focus on, nothing has value. I felt my phone buzz in my pocket. News alerts, new virtual friends online, emails from work, all vying for my attention.

I look at my watch. It's getting late.

I look around and see everyone's eyes glued to their screens or wearing headphones, and in their own world. Can't say I blame them. I take out my phone and join them.

The real world is so bland and slow now. Scrolling through my feed, I see riots in Beirut, Kellogg's trying a new brand of cereal, and the CEO Coca-Cola being accused of sexual harassment. Instant news all the time. I can stay connected with the world, more than ever before.

I approach a busy crosswalk with a crowd of people without looking up, still scrolling through my feed. Cars zoom in front of me. Huh, there's a security breach in retail stores around the U.S. Need to check my info just to be sa- I stumble forward into the busy street. Someone from behind me accidentally bumped into me. I smash my head on the concrete and feel the warm blood trickle down my face.

I look up and see a screeching truck hurtling towards me. It can't slow down.

Then it stopped. Not because of the breaks. It froze. I looked around, everything was frozen. The blood from my head wound continues to run.

I stood and felt no pain in my head. Everyone around me is frozen. The cars, advertisements, people, trees, and even the birds were frozen mid-activity.

My watch continues ticking. The sun is frozen in its position among the stars. I dropped my phone in the tumble. It lies shattered and useless on the pavement.

And I'm stuck in a frozen world.

-----  
**10 minutes passed**

I walk the streets of this new world searching for an escape. A way out. Everything is frozen. People are stuck mid-stride, mid-eating a sandwich, mid-sentence, mid-driving, mid-living the life they once were.

"Are they actually frozen?", I said aloud the first time. My voice didn't echo in this silent world.

"I guess it's just me now."

I walk the streets hoping for some idea or some miracle to appear and get me out. I at least need to get to a pharmacy for my injury.

The automatic sliding glass doors are shut. I walk to the doors. BAAM! I forgot everything is frozen. The automatic doors won't move.

"There's gotta be something. Crowbar." My eyes scan the surroundings until they land on a small rock on the ground. Albeit a small rock, but y'know beggars can't be choosers.

With my arm cranked back, I launch the rock into the glass. The rock hits the glass, but stops. I walk closer to inspect the glass. Not a single crack. The rock is resting on the glass. I touch the glass and see the crack from the impact of the rock propagate throughout the glass, shattering it.

"So I can move time forward by touching objects."

I kept one hand on the glass and the other leans on the frame of the door. The motion detector, which then opened the glass doors automatically.

I scoff, "of course it opens."

Everyone inside the store is frozen as well.

I cleaned my head wound and stopped the bleeding. I take my broken phone out of my pocket. "Time to find a new one."

-----

### **30 min passed**

The cell phone store is empty, but it has new phones lining the walls. I took a similar phone and switched out SIM cards with my old phone.

"Who do I dial?" I tried dialing 911, but nothing. No sound. No ringing. No dial tone. Nothing. The phones won't work. Shit. Ok, let's think.

"Since I can move time forward using my hands, then touching someone's shoulder should allow them to talk."

The cell phone store clerk is standing behind a desk. His eyes are frozen, looking at a computer screen. His hands frozen, trying to type something in. I walk to him and place my hand on his shoulder. He began typing and his head moved to look at my hand on his shoulder.

"Dude what are you doing", spoke the clerk. He looked around seeing no one else around.

"I need your help", I started. "I'm stuck in time. Everyone around me is frozen. How do I get out?"

"What are you talking about? I'm not frozen." I look around, realizing that we're the only ones in the store.

"Ok, follow me outside but I need to keep my hand on your shoulder." I guide the clerk to his storefront. Everything around us is frozen.

"Dude, Holy Crap! How long have you been stuck like this?"

"Half an hour. Look, I need your help to get out."

"Are we in Groundhog Day? Cause that would totally be awesome. Wait, are you Bill Murray?"

"What? NO. I NEED your help. How do I get out?"

"I don't know. All the movies I've seen about time travel, involve traveling through time not being stuck in time. Why am I not frozen?"

"Cause I'm touching you. I can move time forward by touching something with my hands. But you don't know how to get me out?"

"Other than building a time machine, No. I'm sorry. I don't know how I'd survive."  
I let go of his shoulder.

-----

### **40 min passed**

It's not the lack of virtual interaction or phone access that bothers me, it's the silence. There's no audible feedback from anything. Sometimes I think I hear the wind blowing and people walking, but I'm just imagining them.

I head home to my one-bedroom apartment. It's quiet and still as usual, but the traffic and humdrum of

life ceased. I'm alone in an eerie opaque silence. Any sound would be audible to me at this point. Ants crawling on the floor. The buzzing of a fly. The gently waving of the flower. But instead, everything is quiet and still. And dead.

I try to sleep, but I can't. The evening sun is bright and warm.

"Ok ok ok ok ok", I try to regain my composure. "Who else might be able to help? A scientist! A physicist. They should be able to help."

I take out my computer to search physics laboratories near me to find one that's 3 miles from me. Towards the center of the city. I look at the car clogged streets.

"I'll just steal someone's bike."

-----

**45 min passed**

I grabbed a rock and broke into the physics building. "Never realized so many buildings had automatic doors", I thought to myself.

The lobby's filled with people wearing lab coats frozen in place. Finding a scientist is harder than it seems because not all scientists wear white lab coats with glasses. I find a woman mid-stride carrying papers and assume she's someone who can help.

I put my hand on her shoulder. She stumbles forward, dropping her papers.

"What- what-who-what are you doing?"

"I need your help. I'm stuck in time. Everyone is frozen around. How do I get out?" She looks around realizing that everyone but the two of us are frozen.

"I- well-there-there's a theory. Time is dependent upon entropy increasing. So you want to move time forward, increase entropy....But you seem to have stopped it because time is frozen. So you've already done the impossible."

"So increasing entropy is my best bet?"

"I don't know what else you can do."

"How can I increase entropy?--"

"But time has stopped", started the scientist. She seems to be off in her own world. "So you've stopped increasing entropy. So time and entropy are the same thing? Or are they different?"

"How can I increase entropy?" I ask again.

"Increasing the temperature. Anything to increase the disorder."

"Well, I stole a bike and broke the glass doors to get in here. How much disorder do I need to make?"

"Assuming time has stopped everywhere. Universe size disorder."

"I can't wreck the entire universe."

She hung her head. "No, you can't. I'm sorry. I don't know what else to do." I remove my hand from her shoulder and leave the physics building.

-----

**55 min passed**

I wander aimlessly among the streets with the sun frozen in the sky casting a golden hue on everything

and

warming my skin. The city does look quite beautiful, but I can't focus on that now. I need to focus on getting out.

"Maybe a philosopher might have an answer", I say to myself. A single voice remains the only sign of life in this silent world.

"Where would I find a philosopher? At the library? I'll try the university."

I ride my bike to my university and find a philosophy professor. An old man working in his office with his back towards the window and grab his shoulder.

The old man looks around confused and speaks in a dry tone. "What are you doing? Let go of me."

"I'm stuck in time. I need help getting out. Everything is frozen. How do I unfreeze it?"

"Time is an illusion of the mind, it's made up. Things move forward only because we measure it to be. We use clocks to measure time, but time does not exist. We made up time to keep track of everything."

"What?"

"Time is a flat circle", said the philosopher assuringly.

"That doesn't help. Do you know how I can get out of this?"

"You must overcome the illusion. Let go of all what you perceive to be true. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what wouldn't be, it would."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm sorry but you might have to go gentle into that good night. Now let go."

I push him away.

-----

### **60 min pass**

"Kill myself? I can't do that. There has to be another way. I - I can't. I won't."

I wander the silent streets once more searching for answers. My watch continues to tick. The birds mid-flight look gorgeous. The feathers are vibrantly colored and soft.

"I can't kill myself", I said as I looked around the street. Everyone remains frozen unaware of my presence and of the choice I must make.

I reach the edge of the city. A gate stops me from falling over the large precipice and into the deathly ocean and rocks below. The waves are frozen as well. Other people are standing by the fence, enjoying their evening. Large Lamp Posts are beside the gate and line the perimeter. A light before the edge of darkness of the ocean.

The sun's in clear view now. For the first time, I feel its warmth. A warm embrace enveloping my entire body. I see a bench with an old homeless woman sitting on it. I join her and sit beside her. She's wrapped in heavy coats and ragged clothing.

Taking in the divine scenery one more time, my hand accidentally brushes against hers.

"Enjoying the evening?" The old homeless woman speaks in a voice full of life.

"What? Yeah- yes. It's a beautiful evening." I leave my hand close to hers enough to stay. It's nice to have someone to talk to before the end.

"Why is everything frozen?" She looks around seeing the waves, the people, the birds, and the trees are all frozen.

"Time has stopped. I don't know how to escape it."

"Why would you want to escape it?"

"What do you mean?"

"You're frozen in time. You can do anything you want without losing anything."

"Well, I-I miss the world. My friends. The strangers. It's too silent without them. I miss them."

Birds are frozen in flight nearby. People are frozen mid-stride and a seagull is perched on a fence overlooking the frozen ocean.

"At night, the bus streets would be covered in neon lights and the colors would travel miles across the city. I miss the little spot of nature in the city reminding us of our roots, providing the cleanest air and a peaceful atmosphere. On rainy days, the water perfectly reflects the city lights in the puddles. I miss it."

"It is beautiful here. I'm glad you see it", says the homeless woman. "Life will pass you by if you don't pay attention."

I stand up and walk towards the gate. The waves look supernatural the way they curve around the rocks and build upon the sea. There's a seagull on the railing of the gate looking towards the city.

One last look, I turn towards the city and gaze upon its glory and presence. 100 years of industrialization built this.

Grasping the lamppost, I hoisted myself and stood upon the gate. My feet balance precariously on the smooth metal gate. The waves are still frozen below. The sunlight glistens on the frozen water.

It is a beautiful world.

Too bad I couldn't see it before, but I see it now.

"hey", speaks a voice from behind me.

I almost lose my grip on the lamppost and slip off the gate, but a hand grabs onto my clothes.

"Hey", said the man holding onto me. He wears a concerned look "You alright?"

I look back and see someone grabbing onto me. They're not frozen.

"You're not frozen", I say.

"What? No. Why would I be?" The person helps me step down from the gate. "Are you ok? Would you like to join me for dinner?"

"Yeah-yes. I'd love to."

We walk back into the revived city to enjoy the simple pleasures of life.

In this moment, everything changed and yet nothing had happened.

