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Thoughtless Thoughts About Time Travel

This is supposed to be a story. It should have a boy growing up slowly, not horrified as the missiles carved apart the sky, when everyone promised they never would.

His eyes open sharply to a new sense of consciousness, akin to the feeling of being engrossed in a book or daydream, then suddenly snapping back to reality.

Now he sits cross-legged next to classmates from an entire school ago, in the gymnasium with a blue logo in the middle and shiny squeaky wooden floorboards, in a body that he had hated for its periodic growths of acne that he eventually learned to address and accept.

Were their voices and egos always so annoying to him? The idle chatter of children without much to talk about except their schedules and what they had for lunch permeated and echoed along the wooden floorboards.

He gazes at the girl seated in front of him with the smooth, perfect-length hair- as if her mother did it for her each morning. The smart one who had perfect grades and studied math at Carnegie Mellon. Beside her was an acne-less boy who played on the school's basketball team who later blew up on Tik Tok, posting anime impressions and partying all the time on his social media posts. And he could never forget that cute art girl on the other side of the seating arrangement, who carved her own path and made it big time as a graphics designer, one with a multi-million dollar startup that created designs for a variety of tech companies around the Bay.

Could he be like them- stories of success- or would he become like the others, faded into obscurity?

Just behind him was the boy who crossed the street in front of the school without looking, on the main road where drivers always drove at least double of what the speed limit was. The one who had flowers and small candles that burned away left along the main road as the new crosswalk lights were being installed. There was also the musical girl who had a rad smile, wearing brown tribal-themed sweaters and always carrying around a black guitar case with small stickers and pins, who ended it all after graduating college and not being able to find a job, leaving horrible acquaintances' stories on social media that "*she should have done it sooner,*" so as not to burden her family with her debts.

Compared to all of them, he was talentless and could not imagine even equaling the future achievements of the children around him.

As the weight of 9 billion lives pressed itself against his mind, his brain began beating like a heart, with each pounding a new current of warm blood to his head. Thoughts began to twist like a rose's death, the stem dulling and crinkling up into a semi-circle as its petals came floating down, one at a time.

Today, they were all just children. No accomplishments, no life experiences, and no knowledge of death. The boy entertained the thought of saving the dead ones he knew of. Or at least bettering the lives of those around him. Then a reality set in, that those he saved today, would only die in a few years.

Saving the world? Who would believe him? Even if he began reciting the news like a prophet, he would probably get kidnapped by hedge fund traders or get-rich-quick Redditors- not

that he knew which could be worse- until his knowledge ran out. His body would then be given to pharmaceutical companies, who would run experiments on him to see if there were any changes. Finally, once all of science had run its course on his body, his bones would be shipped to some random attraction or tourist trap to be put on display.

His vision grew shaky and his gaze monotonous, as he sat, stiller than even that perfect academic in front, whose perfectly straight back and posture made her look untouchable, like a statue. His shallow breaths were incapable of being heard. He never knew a thirst like this before, where the dryness of his throat almost hurt in its existence. As toxic thoughts collided in his head, a series of oddities manifested in his head.

When the bombs fell again, would someone always be brought back in time in a never ending repeating cycle? What would the use of that be? Would the repetition of time be seen as a net good or bad- would humanity as a whole experience a state of net happiness or suffering throughout this period over and over again?

What if there was no repeat after this one? Would humans cease to exist, their bones decomposing into oil, serving to jump start the next species that came millions of years afterwards?

Would that new species come to the conclusion that, with several notable examples, humans tended to live close to rivers and arable land of the old continent? Would they dumb down humans, believing that their remains were merely byproducts of villages living over long periods of time rather than metropolises of millions of individuals in an unprecedented

population spike? That the bombs that fell were asteroids rather than nukes, and the glass particles of buildings were merely sand that was superheated into glass by those impacts?

Is the cycle of life in both of these scenarios, simply a series of momentary happinesses surrounded by an eternity of suffering?

Suddenly, as if to break away from these thoughts, his body shook uncontrollably, as he moved on to darker fantasies.

What if everyone went back into time, except for me?

It would take a few weeks for everyone to know.

That someone did not accompany them back in time, and was still their perfect, innocent self. At first, everyone might be willing to help- teach the kid what they learned in their lives. Yet those who are different are exciting and entertaining.

The floor is shaking as the boy's body shudders. A few pants part from his mouth.

It wouldn't take long for the bullying to start. All sorts of abuses hurled at this young child without knowledge of the world yet. Eventually, the child may be spoon fed by the government and others, as his will to achieve anything collapsed entirely, wilted and in the shadows of others' abilities.

Or perhaps, the child would die innocent. One little prank from those who learned darkness in their lives, that escalated and ended his life. Maybe a knife, or a shove of thousands that went wrong, as the boy collapsed onto the shiny wooden floorboards with a thud, never to get up again.

The boy lay shaking on the floor while the tears and blood from a nosebleed mix into a

mixture on the floor.

If he was still awake, he would notice that those he idolized in his past- sorry, future- and all the others alike, all simply stared at his broken state, while a gym teacher called an ambulance with another teacher holding him upright and shouting, “Are you alright? Are you alright?”

When next he awoke, with a dull continuous headache, in the backseat of his parents’ car.

They ate his favorite meal, a sushi place that closed down a few years in the future. Their sushi bento was great, fairly priced, and all meals came with a scoop of mango or green tea ice cream at the very end.

As the miso soup warmed up his insides, his father patted his back and he almost choked, wolfing down the side salad as both of his parents looked on with concern.

“It’s alright, eat slowly. You’ll be alright, you’re still so young. You can get better grades next year.”

He placed the spoonful of ice cream slowly into his mouth, inverting it so the ice cream lay on his tongue, and simply leaving the spoon in his mouth, allowing the ice cream to melt slowly. He had forgotten the cold comfort of springs such as this one. The future springs always seemed like a scorching summer, unrelenting in its heat, while autumns felt like winters, the cold piercing the deepest reaches of his body under layers of clothing.

“Yeah, I think I’ll be alright.”