

Today, I slowed down time.

3:12

As much as I'd like to say I've stopped it, I haven't. No. Only slowed it.

I wish I could say that I can stop time.

But I can clearly see the flash of the muzzle dissipating into the air. I can clearly see the casing, halfway through the process of ejection. I can clearly see the golden glint of the sun on the corner of the brass. And if I imagine hard enough, I think I could see the inscription on the bottom, listing the maker and caliber.

I can clearly see the angle it's about to take. I know the edge of the casing will catch on the sleeve of the man shooting me. It will take another tumble before clinking on the ground, not all too different from the foley in movies that I've heard a million times before. Only, I won't hear it this time.

Because I can clearly see the bullet. Inching its way toward me, ever so slightly faster than the speed of sound. I suppose I can't say clearly. It's not as clear as it should be through my car's windshield, caked in filth and rain and wipers and gnats and filth and rain and again *God*, I wish I could stop time. But that bullet is moving. So slowly, I had to chart its progress against a landmark. Like placing your cursor up to a loading bar, just to make sure your computer hasn't crashed or frozen. But I made sure of it. It's moving. Without a doubt. And it's going to kill me, and I can't do anything about it because I only found out I can slow down time. Not stop it.

All I did was slow down on the shoulder of the road. *Fucking slow down just slow not stop*. Just for a second. The briefest of moments, before someone walked in front of my car,

wearing a balaclava over his head. It's not cold out. It's fall, but it's not cold today. That's why I stopped. To admire the trees. They glittered in the wind, yellow leaves fluttering like a million butterflies. Until they stopped—sorry—slowed. Now they just blink at me, gently. But they were still glittering when I heard the man speak.

“Get out of the car.”

He sounded reasonably calm when he said it. He didn't shout. Just raised his voice loud enough for me to hear it over the growl of the engine. That should have been my warning. The one chance I had to realize that he was ready to shoot when he leveled that gun at me. So, of course, I stomped on the gas. I pushed the pedal to the floor. Through the floor. Through the ground. I'd kill him if I had to. Could I do that? *Kill him?*

And he squeezed the trigger.

I wish I could stop time. I don't think it'd make a difference anyway. I slowed down time, but I slowed down too. So, I suppose it stands to reason that stopping time would stop me, as well. And then where would I be? Frozen forever with no idea how to turn the ignition on time again. At least this way, it'll end. Eventually. All it would mean is more time, anyway. More time to stare down the barrel of the gun. *But at least I'd be alive.*

*Right?*

*Sour grapes.*

I can see the color start to drain from my knuckles. I can feel the tension through the tendons on each finger. My muscles stiffen—they are stiffening as my car prepares to bear down on him. Slowly.

But time hasn't slowed down everywhere.

I see now, there is a car passing to my left. Time crawls, but the car is moving faster than even the bullet. It's not a hard metric to beat when the bullet moves at a snail's pace, but it's moving, nonetheless. Time is localized to my position and the further things are, the faster they move. The more normal they are. I see them pass like an inverted Doppler effect. And I wonder why this patch of land hasn't been ripped from the Earth and gotten left behind in space as the rest of the world goes spinning away at 67,000 miles an hour.

In the passing car there is a child. A little boy, sitting in the back, peering out the window. His eyes are locked to my predicament. But he will pass by without a second thought. The car will pass before the sound of the gunshot even reaches it. The boy will be none the wiser. And when the sound does reach the car, the parents will hear. The mother—the driver—will make frantic glances to the rear and sideview mirrors.

“Did you hear that?” she'll ask.

And the father, too slouched, and too engrossed in his phone to care or notice, will comment, “Somebody probably bust a tire.”

The mother will not slow an inch. Her foot will not move from the pedal. In fact, she may even press into it, as she cranes her head to the right and back, in curiosity. But she has the choice to.

I don't.

My foot is glued to the pedal. Glued to the floor. To the ground. In the one moment that I made my choice to drive rather than get out. The one moment I get to spend eternity with.

I was supposed to be on the road by now. To a birthday party. I had forgotten that it was today, until the text came in. A mutual friend planned a surprise party. I was glad someone could remind me. It saved me the embarrassment of asking myself. Of not showing up in the first place. I wouldn't have actually asked. I would far sooner scour through old messages and profile details, hoping that they were actual birthdays, and not just a random date they plugged into account creation. So, I was glad to see that someone else had the consideration to remember. Or the consideration to save their birthdays on a calendar. Not that I believe I suffer from a *lack* of consideration. I worry myself over being inconsiderate for not remembering birthdays. I can only remember my own. *Of course, I can only remember my own.* But does that make me selfish? That much worse of a person? Perhaps, I wish I were worse of a person than I am now. I wouldn't even bother getting up for that text. Or bother slowing down to admire the trees. *Fucking slowing down.* And I'd still be alive.

The bullet has reached the windshield now. I see the spot where the glass begins to curve and flex under the unyielding momentum of the bullet. A very slight arch, since it is of course, just glass, and it will break any second. I am helpless to do anything but watch because I have slowed time for myself. Helpless to watch as the windshield crosses the point of no return. Helpless as the windshield blisters white. It bends. And bows. And breaks. A ripple in a pond, splashes of glass. It shatters into a sparkling shower, like a screenshot of the sky in rain. The bullet forges through, brushing aside fragments as it barrels toward me.

I wish I hadn't slowed down time.

All anyone wants, when they slow down time, is to have more of it. And now I have all the time in the world. My world. My world of roughly thirty feet and nothing to do with it. As if

pushing the matter back would solve something. As if kicking the bucket down the road would preclude kicking the bucket in the first place.

Unfortunately, I have however long this fraction of a second lasts wholly to myself. All of this moment to think. Maybe this is how your life flashes before your eyes? You create it yourself. It only seems fitting then, to retread my past regrets. All the times I spent 5 minutes too long in the shower. 10 minutes too long in bed every morning. Every hour stacked upon hour that I've wasted doing nothing. Naturally, perfectly, I will spend this last second doing nothing. Simply lamenting over time, and the fact that I can do nothing about the fact that I did nothing.

And I look at the man who shot me. The man who has killed me—or will kill me in the very near eternity. I know I’m already dead. I already know I’m dead. Time just hasn’t caught up with me yet. I want to memorize the features of this man. His mask sits a little far off his face. Perhaps he has a prominent nose. Maybe his lips are thin, or they’re just pursed. I want to look into the eyes of the man who killed me. And...

His eyes are *closed*.

*Look at me. Are you fucking kidding me? Look at me. Don't close your eyes. Look at me!*

*Look at me. If you're going to kill me at least look me in the fucking eyes when you do it.*

*lookatmelookatmelookatmelookatme. im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im*

*alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im*

*alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im alone im*

*alone*

*im fucking alonealonealone dead dying.*

He can't hear me.

I can't hear me.

I can't scream. I can't even grimace or give him a hate-filled look he won't ever see. My muscles can't contract fast enough. They can't course-correct from the path I already set.

Straight into the bullet.

I know it's too late. By the time his eyes open again, I'll be long gone.

Maybe he'll be gone too. Maybe my car will ram into his midsection. Maybe it'll carry him off the road and into the slowly blinking trees and make a shower of leaves in fall.

The polyurethane of the steering wheel splinters, and sprouts in plastic flowers around the bullet. I pray for the bullet to divert its attention away from me. To glance off the steel core of the wheel and spear harmlessly through my arm or shoulder. I've never prayed before. And with my arms locked tightly at 10 and 2, I can't even clasp my hands together, so I doubt my prayer would even reach the proper channels. But it misses. Not me, the core of the steering wheel.

I have never been able to sit still in my life. With every movie, play, or concert, I vacillate between sleep and interest. And my head vacillates too, nodding back and forth like a drowsy fucking bobblehead. But there's nothing interesting here. There are no shocking twists or booming instruments. Just a bullet. It's paint drying. It's normal. I'll die normal. The coroner will scribble "John Doe" in a book, and I'll get added to the 60 or 70% of murders that go unsolved. Or maybe they will solve it, and they'll toss the guy in a cell for 20-odd years. Maybe they'll put a name to my face if they find him before he ditches my wallet, thirty-seven bucks lighter.

The bullet has left my line of sight, passing under my chin and out of my peripheral. But I can still feel it. Pressing against the cloth of my shirt. Pressing into the thin layer of flesh. Pressing into the bones of my ribs. Just like the glass, my ribs will bend and bow and break, to make way for the royal procession of the bullet. I can *sense* the bullet scraping along the bone, making its leisurely way toward my heart, where it will rent a hole through it. My heart will continue to do what it has always done, and unknowingly pump itself into an early grave.

The skin of my back is drawn taut as the bullet squeezes against it. The blood begins to erupt from my chest. Hot. My personal pyroclastic flows. The bullet will snap through my back and tear through my shirt. A clean pierce through my body. It will likely end up lodged in the seat, plunging into the polyester cushioning behind me. The pain is chronic. It endures. It lasts for an eternity or just a second. It lasts until I can forget it. Until I can ignore it, like a friend's birthday.

I watch as the mist sprays out from beneath me. It radiates out. It's radiation. I watch my life disintegrate. I'm watching it decay, cellular decay. I can almost hear the Geiger counter ticking away, like a clock counting down all the seconds I've lost. I'm already dead, but I can hear the rumble now. Thirty feet and one second, the speed of sound is catching up like an earthquake and it shakes me. Only me. It hasn't rained in a while. My plume of blood saturates the air that desperately needs moisture. The word in German for damp and wet is "Nass." It is not the "a" in "ass." It is the "a" that fills the mouth, like the cloying humid air of copper and iron and lead that will cling to the back of my throat. When I draw my last breath, it will be against a shattered rib cage. It will be a breath that goes right through me. And then time will start to move again. Time starts to move again.

Today, I died an hour ago.