

SS-2

## Time's Up

We passed each other nearly every day. Sometimes twice. The first time at 8:04, when we would both hurry through the big glass revolving doors of our towering office building because we were late for something important that started at 8 on the dot. Then again at 4:31. We were always late going in, never late heading out.

I noticed these times of the day because they were the highlights of my otherwise mundane life. I also noticed whether she was wearing pants or a skirt and if she was holding folders at her side. Sometimes I'd see her black hair flowing past her shoulders. If I was feeling particularly brave, I raised my eyes high enough to see if she was wearing her maroon lipstick. But I never dared look any higher.

Tuesday at 4:31, I got a light tap on my shoulder followed by the sweetest, "Hey, you dropped this." She held out her hand to give me the flash drive that had fallen out of my bag. I raised my hand to take it and my eyes to thank her, but before I could get the words out, I froze.

0 years, 0 days, 02:58

This is why I never look higher. This is why I keep my eyes on the ground. This is why I don't have friends or family or water cooler chats at the office. I don't want to fucking know when people are going to die. Because I might find out the girl I have been crushing on from the nose down for months had less than 3 minutes left.

Still holding her hand out, her smile started to fade. "I gotta catch my train, so....," she said with a flicking motion of her wrist to signal she was done with this exchange.

"You're gonna die," I blurted out. I grabbed her shoulders, knocking the damn thumb drive out of her hand. "Just sit down. Just - just - just sit right here. Don't leave!" I nearly pushed her onto a bench. I took my hands off her shoulders to grab my own head in frustration. I scanned the lobby to see who or what might possibly kill her. But I grabbed her wrist when I realized she'd gotten over the shock of the last 7 seconds and was quickly heading toward the doors. "You can't go! You-you-you're gonna die, you're going to die... Stay here, please!"

"Let go of me!" she screams while she tries to yank free. "Someone help! He's crazy!" she screams to the sane people all around.

All I wanted was for her to wait it out. If she sat on the bench in the lobby guarded by a guy with a gun that only allowed clearance to people with badges, maybe she would have lived. But a lifetime of avoiding human relationships leaves some glaring holes in how to conduct them. The

security guard who could not see her timer instead focused all his attention on the asshole who was grabbing a scared, screaming woman. AKA: me.

"You're gonna die! I can see these things. Your clock - it's only got a little...You can't go!" Even as I said it, I knew it sounded ridiculous.

The security guard broke us apart and held me firm while she backed away. She readjusted her jacket and purse before shaking her head and letting out a disgusted sigh. Nervous to fully turn her back on me, she made her way to the door to catch her train, to get away from me.

For a split second, I imagined her texting her friends about the madman who attacked her in her office lobby. Then I see she's got 02:04 left. She won't have much of a conversation about this.

I dropped to my knees as I watched her leave. The security guard still had me by one arm and said something that I didn't listen to. For the first time, I was able to look at my soon-to-dead crush, but instead of admiring her beauty, I saw all of the ways she might die in the next two minutes. Would those big blue eyes see a stray bullet coming at her? Would her hair piled up in a bun come undone when a car hit her? Would the bullet or car have missed her if I hadn't seen her 2:58 timer and stalled her usual routine by 54 seconds? Was this my fault?

I got fired over the incident, of course, and subsequently banned from the building. I didn't know her name, and in a city of this size, tragedy and death are so commonplace that matching an obituary to a 20-something year old female is nearly impossible, much less a news story.

So I'm working from home from now on. Avoiding all people and interaction entirely. I get up in the morning and at 8:04, I think about the girl that used to give me sunshine. Now, with the blinds drawn to avoid an accidental human sighting, I look in the mirror. Damn, 54 more years of this bullshit.