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Rushing

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Rushing

By Sienna Sullivan

“You’ve got to be kidding me.”

I mumble under my breath as I peer over my steering wheel to read my speedometer.

15 miles per hour.

As someone who considers the speed limit to rest *at least* 5 miles over what is posted, the line of cars I was trailing in a residential was going far too slow for my mood that afternoon.

It’s Wednesday, which means my day hasn’t stopped since my 7:00 am alarm. Classes, tutoring, practice, and now it’s now almost 6:30 pm, and I am approximately 3 minutes away from a hot shower, a filling meal, and collapsing on the couch with the book I’ve been too busy to get past chapter one in for Lord knows how long. Or I *would* be 3 minutes away if I weren’t stuck behind a Mennonite buggy holding up a line of anxious post-work and school commuters like myself.

It’s moments like these when I ask myself why, of all the colleges I could have attended, I chose to spend four years in rural southern Virginia where the word “rush” is foreign to most natives, including the horse-drawn carriage currently impeding my journey home.

Where I’m from—as my West Virginia-hailing roommate likes to call “the city,” but I know better as “the suburbs”—this blockage would be met with a horde of angry honks and rolled down windows to expose thrashing fist, curses, and a few flipped birds.

But this is not “the city.” To my left is what appears to be endless rows of feeding corn. And to my right—wow. As I look outside my passenger window, the view takes my breath away, along with the urgency and annoyance I was focused on moments before.

My car has just eclipsed the precipice of the hilly road on the way to my apartment. I guess I’m always speeding to or from somewhere too quickly to notice the splendor of my surroundings. The sun is just beginning to set, turning the sky stunning shades of peach and crimson to match the trees along the horizon starting to reflect the changing season.

From where my car is perched (stagnant on the road, of course), there is undeniable beauty in the emptiness of the hillside. There is green grass, neat rows of budding corn, and the metallic domes of silos reflecting the golden sun for miles.

Though I bring my attention back to the road ahead, putting pressure on the accelerator to inch forward, the urgency doesn’t return.

In front of me, a green hatchback swerves over the double yellow lines to assess the possibility of accelerating in the opposing lane to pass the trotting vehicle at the head of the jam—a sure sign of impatience and action which I’ve performed, many times. Watching the driver frustratingly debate whether to slam the gas makes me laugh.

Why are we all in such a rush?

Though I can't speak to my traffic compatriots' evening plans, there is no harm in a few extra minutes being tacked to my commute (other than maybe never getting to that book). Right now is one of the few instances where I am not pressed for time, nor do I have any obligations to be anywhere.

In my Spanish class, we discussed the difference in culture between Spanish-speaking countries and the US. It seems this "Great Nation" has us all convinced that productivity is the key to a happy life. Meanwhile, in Spain, in small towns like Vigo, business hours start later, end earlier, and shops can be closed midday, without warning, for an impromptu lunch or siesta.

Here in America, we are reared from elementary school to cram our lunch period in 30 minutes. By the time we get to high school, in 20. At my first job, I was lucky to steal away from the sales floor long-enough to take two bites of my turkey sandwich.

Beyond expedited mealtimes, school systems leave little time to "live in the moment." As students, we are expected to perform well in every class to set ourselves up for an elusive *successful future*. The right GPA will get you into the best college; the more rigorous the prerequisites, the more prestigious the diploma. My dad texted me the night before my freshman year finals: "Study like the rest of your life depends on it. Because it does."

In my abnormal psychology class, we learned that anxiety is a future-oriented disorder. I learned this at age 5, writhing and wailing in the backseat of my mom's car in the kiss-n-ride lane, terrified at the thought of entering the school building. I was again reminded of its future-fearing quality at age 18 when I broke down in heaving sobs in the hallway before my high school graduation, this time dreading departure.

The future is a scary and uncertain thing. We fear it because it runs the risk of resembling the past. Pasts can be painful. And pain is best braved with our eyes squeezed shut and quickly, like ripping off a Band-Aid.

But when do we open our eyes? When do we slow down and revel in the beautiful simplicity of the world around us? When do we stop being afraid of stillness?

Rather than follow suit of the swerving Subaru, I roll down my windows—not to flip anyone off—spin the bell on my stereo and exhale, allowing my formerly rigid back to mold to the seat and loosen my grip on the steering wheel.

And while I'm sure the meaning behind the lyrics don't reflect the theme of this essay, I couldn't help but smile at the serendipity of the Supertramp verse echoing out at that moment:

"You took the long way home."

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