

The world often moves too fast.

Its motion is constant, never ceasing; it dazzles, it excites, it disappoints. Every year we hope that it will relinquish its hold on reality, that it will grace us with pause after too long a day in darkness. Yet every year, we wake once more to that gray sunrise we call our lifetime. A machine, a ticking clock; each stroke of the second hand a thousand memories lost.

So readily we forget how valuable each of those memories are, almost unconsciously waiting for the realization to hit us, how quickly time leaves us behind. One such occasion happened to me around a month ago, give or take.

It was a cold sort of dreary day, the sort that makes one stare beseechingly at the sky, not even knowing what they are waiting for.

The sort that forces the world to stop, or at least struggle for breath.

In that time—the time when the world paused—I came to an understanding unmatched in my lifetime.

Like everyone else on that cold sort of dreary day, I was watching the clouds pass me by in the window, waiting, like all others, for the rain. Below the window a rosebush made its home; being the only pop of color in a gray view, it was a welcome sight. Listlessly I gazed out the window, dimly aware of the rhythm of my life, my work, my writings behind me, beckoning to a more dedicated me.

I knew in my head that I ought to get back to work. Freshman year of high school meant, to me, not that I had the opportunity to become acquainted gradually with the ever-increasing pressure of time, but that I ought to plunge myself into it, all at once. I rather thought, at the time, that diamonds are formed only under pressure; and that if I intended to be among the priciest, I surely had to know the most stress.

But this was one of those days that drive one to lethargy, and I was no different from the norm. Out of the corner of my eye the rosebush waved lazily in the wind; my eyes fixed on it, and I stared without seeing.

Meanwhile my mind ticked on, telling me how much work I had to do. The seniors, it said, often faced burnout. They had to push through it; they had to keep working, and so did I. One day could make the difference, argued my brain, between an exceptional performance and failure.

Perhaps it was the laziness of the day; perhaps it was that I was tired, from my limbs to the furthest recess of my mind. Perhaps it was the petals of the rose, scarlet and crimson, winking in the corner of my eye, the color of risk.

But for once, I argued with my brain.

Yes, I agreed with it; many older than me had pushed through, entreated themselves to endure. But, I reasoned, this was because they had a passion for what they were doing, a reason behind it. They did work not because they ought to, but because they loved to.

Amid my rhetoric, a profound realization suddenly hit me.

I had no passion.

To be clear, I do not refer to passion for success. That I had much of, perhaps a surplus of; it was the driving force behind all I did. No, what I mention here is not a passion for achievement, but of interest.

I knew not what I wanted to do. I heard, but I did not listen; I looked, but I did not see; I learned, but I did not question. I sought to know nothing more than I needed to. Everything I did was not for the betterment of me, but for the superiority over my peers, something that, I realized in that moment, was entirely inconsequential.

I was better than my peers when I competed with them.

But I was better off when I ignored them.

This realization took me, unfortunately, far too long to discover. And yet had the world kept moving, had time not halted for me, had the pressure and burden of competition continued without that fateful rainy and desolate day, I could not have come across it at all.

When the world stopped, so too did my internal competition with everyone else to be the best. In the blink of an eye, I had suddenly lost all interest in the society of the hypercompetitive. I did not care to be trapped in their games.

New insight came with every raindrop that fell from the sky, and I watched it all pour down, washing away all the pressure of perfection.

And as I reveled in the joy of the unburdened, I watched the rosebuds bloom.