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THERE IS A PLACE WHERE TIME STANDS STILL.

Raindrops hang motionless in air. Pendulums of clocks float mid-swing. Dogs raise their muzzles in silent howls. Pedestrians are frozen on the dusty streets, their legs cocked as if held by strings. The aromas of dates, mangoes, coriander, cumin are suspended in space. As a traveler approaches this place from any direction, he moves more and more slowly.

For this is the center of time. From this place, time travels outward in concentric circles at rest at the center, slowly picking up speed at greater diameters.

AND SO, AT THE PLACE WHERE TIME STANDS STILL, ONE SEES PARENTS CLUTCHING THEIR CHILDREN, IN A FROZEN EMBRACE THAT WILL NEVER LET GO. THE BEAUTIFUL YOUNG DAUGHTER WITH BLUE EYES AND BLOND HAIR WILL NEVER STOP SMILING THE SMILE SHE SMILES NOW, WILL NEVER LOSE THIS SOFT PINK GLOW ON HER CHEEKS, WILL NEVER GROW WRINKLED OR Tired, WILL NEVER GET INJURED, WILL NEVER UNLEARN WHAT HER PARENTS HAVE TAUGHT HER, WILL NEVER THINK THOUGHTS THAT HER PARENTS DON'T KNOW, WILL NEVER KNOW EVIL, WILL NEVER TELL HER PARENTS THAT SHE DOES NOT LOVE THEM, WILL NEVER LEAVE HER ROOM WITH THE VIEW OF THE OCEAN, WILL NEVER STOP TOUCHING HER PARENTS AS SHE DOES NOW.

And at the place where time stands still, one sees lovers kissing in the shadows of buildings, in a frozen embrace that will never let go. The loved one will never take his arms from where they are now, will never give back the bracelet of memories, will never journey far from his lover, will never place himself in danger in self-defense, will never fail to show his love, will never become jealous, will never fall in love with someone else, will never lose the passion of this instant in time.

One must consider that these statues are illuminated by only the most feeble red light, for light is diminished almost to nothing at the center of time, its vibrations slowed to echoes in vast canyons, its intensity reduced to the faint glow of fireflies.

Those not quite at dead center do indeed move, but at the pace of glaciers. A brush of the hair might take a year, a kiss might take a thousand.

While a smile is returned, seasons pass in the outer world. While a child is hugged, bridges rise. While a GOODBYE is said, cities crumble and are forgotten.

And those who return to the outer world . . . Children grow rapidly, forget the centuries-long embrace from their parents, which to them lasted but seconds. Children become adults, live far from their parents, live in their own houses, learn ways of their own, suffer pain, grow old. CHILDREN CURSE THEIR PARENTS FOR TRYING TO HOLD THEM FOREVER, curse time for their own wrinkled skin and hoarse voices. These now old children also want to stop time, but at another time. They want to freeze their own children at the center of time.

Lovers who return find their friends are long gone. After all, LIFETIMES HAVE PASSED. They move in a world they do not recognize. Lovers who return still embrace in the shadows of buildings, but now their embraces seem empty and alone. Soon they forget the CENTURIES-LONG PROMISES, which to them lasted only seconds. They become jealous even among strangers, say hateful things to each other, lose passion, drift apart, grow old and alone in a world they do not know.

Some say it is best not to go near the center of time. Life is a vessel of sadness, but it is noble to live life, and without time there is no life. Others disagree. They would rather have an eternity of contentment, even if that eternity were fixed and frozen.

*His heartbeats grow farther apart, his breathing slackens, his temperature drops, his thoughts diminish, until he reaches dead center and stops.*

LIKE A BUTTERFLY MOUNTED IN A CASE.