

Measure Time For Me, If You Can

Part One:

The world around the being, inevitably, would change over time. Arguments would be incited, wars would rampage, civilizations would fall, but in the end, everything would be built back again. Fin had seen the phrase “end of the world” be used time and time again despite no ending in sight, only a continuation of eternity. The clock clicked forward, and though the way the people of the world showed or told time changed, the being had decided to stop counting the years it had existed for. Love and loss could catch up to a person on a timeline, within a conscious. Such futile ideas such as love and loss could not, however, catch up to someone—*something*, sorry—so detached it wondered if it even continued an existence. After all, what did it have? Friends, family, even a name... none of that existed for it. Existence began when time did, before the increments became measured. So, Fin existed the same.

Fin. The string of letters had been assigned to it as its name for what must have been a few centuries by now: given by a stranger who spilled sordid stories of Fin in every tavern with an entertaining audience. Despite the initial detachment it felt to the name, it thought the name fitting. Fin: the words that appeared on a blank, black credit screen at the end of a movie. Words that signified an undoubtable, inevitable end. One day, Fin would be that blank screen. The world would have collapsed inward, the lights gone out, the directors gone home, moved on, and yet, Fin would still be there. Possibly, at least. It didn't know what would happen when no solid land laid beneath its feet. Would it float amidst the dwindling stars until it was the only thing left? Would it finally be able to move on? Those were questions Fin didn't want to consider—didn't like to consider.

So, instead, Fin wandered. Like a breeze in the wind, like a foot on a path, like a hand on a clock, it continued. Other times, it rested, and when it opened its eyes, the tide would have changed, the people would have shifted, and life would have continued without it. Fin never knew how long it slept, nor did it care to know. The most recent time, it had awoken to the same bright sun above its head, its eyes no longer shaded by the trees' leaves above. Winter, then. Either two months had passed, or years. Regardless, it shifted, got up, and continued walking.

When was the last time Fin had been conscious? Anymore, awareness felt more like a distant haze of living, the lightest taps of life through its veins that kept its eyes open and its heart beating—metaphorically, of course. Layers upon layers of cotton pressed down over Fin's eyes and ears and mouth and nerves, the fuzzy, clouded feeling weighing down as if about to crack its bones.

Fin shifted its fingers while walking, distantly, realizing its fingers could no longer feel.

Frostbite, presumably.

...It would heal.

Fin continued walking.

Waking up from such a state was a difficult thing. Fin didn't often wake up for that exact reason, preferring to stay unraveled from life and consciousness as long as it could. Slowly, however, the cotton ebbed and wavered, and it felt its eyes raise to the dirt path before it. Movement hurt, eyes especially, as it began to look around. Its fingers twitched, and the slow connection that sparked between its nerves and body felt all too much all too quick. Burnt, singed edges, that's what it would closest equate the feeling to: blazing like fire, but too tender, too overwhelming in the smallest, pinprick way.

Fin let itself fall to the side, its breath coming in again as it breathed for the first time in years. Coughing, sputtering, it remembered it didn't need to breathe, but god, the exhalation of old, stagnant air felt heavenly. Circulation led to the feeling of something changing within Fin, some kind of gear or blood or airway flowing and churning—even though it knew nothing changed, nothing moved within. It blinked, and the world began to come into focus more. Trees. Ice. Snow. Sun. Each became an input it had to file into current understanding. Fin watched the ice sparkle in the tree limbs as it laid there, heaving, blinking, coming “alive” again. It sat there for a day or two before its breathing slowed, its chest heavy and pained. Some of the ice had melted by then—Fin had watched the process.

Again, it stood, successfully this time, and continued down the path, noticing the world around it for once. Depending on how long it would like to stay conscious, it would have to find out the year. How much time had passed?

...The answer didn't mean anything. Time didn't matter—*couldn't* matter. Not to Fin. Not to anyone, really, unless an emotional attachment had formed. At least, that's what it remembered from its time among the people here.

If it remembered correctly, that is.

...Save that worry for another day.

Fin didn't care for time. While the concept did not matter, it could still hurt.

Time: something too flexible, too contrived and confusing for something as steadfast and unmoving as eternity; a continued nuisance, incessantly clicking, ticking, chiming in Fin's ear as it moved forward; a reminder that the world constantly continued.

As if it hadn't learned that from the very moment of its existence.

Time was, simply, measurement of eternity, and eternity did not need to be measured. Days continued. Months continued. Years continued. Why measure it? Why try to understand when or what or why when, in the end, everything would still shatter and break into nothing?

Time couldn't touch eternity, but it threaded its way under Fin's skin despite. Time broke it apart piece by piece into whatever this was, after all. While time often beats others' hearts, starting, stopping, starting again, Fin's heart, well... that stayed trapped on the downbeat. Half of a pulse, no upbeat. That would come when it died—if it died. One beat of a heart, only one, and Fin hadn't ended yet. So, it waited.

Time couldn't kill it, but it could—

Something stopped. The way whatever stopped led to an echo and a ripple through existence, and Fin felt its heart fall another downbeat. Still no upbeat: a good sign. Another downbeat. The clock that ticked within its heart, within its head—tapping, reminding, mentioning again and again that it existed on a measured line—stopped. It could hear the ticking only as a memory, as a lingering presence in the back of its mind of something that should have been established instead chipping away at the brittle and unmoving eternity. Fin felt the feeling within itself, that chip, that scrape, that shatter of something forever becoming something mostly.

The next tick of the clock rang out and continued, as if there had been no fault, no fall, no stutter in its steps. Fin tried to breathe again, knowing this had been a horribly convenient time to come into consciousness again. Usually, it would say the issue was for the waking, living world to deal with, not it. Never Fin.

This, however, dealt with eternity.

Something had touched eternity, and Fin felt the crack shudder and widen and web.

...Time. Time had touched eternity, it realized, the answer coming to Fin through whispers of lives and winds and notions of existence within its creation of being. How had time touched eternity? The two couldn't touch, couldn't be within the reach of one another as one a measurement and the other a steady beat of forever.

Fin shuddered as it felt another crack in the glass, and a creeping, thinning line moved from its back up to its neck, branching out like a small, faint lichenburg structure. The line burned, it realized, not unlike the frostbite in its fingers. Before it could reach back, feel the harm that had been done to eternity, a tug, a pull, led its feet further down the path: a request away from its post, a need to understand what had harmed it, harmed its *livelihood* so. For once in however long, it did not wander but instead moved with a steady pace, a spark of real, true life passing through it for the first time.

Even if that life came with a deep, heavy fear.

~*~

The moment they locked eyes, Fin knew it had found him.

Years—or maybe only days, it had no way or care to check—had passed since it first felt the world stop, time sputtering, stuttering, before returning to rhythm. Its feet took it to the place it was now, a frozen path in an icy village where only a few flowers raised and battled through the snow. The abyss of white and blue behind him let sound be swallowed by the wind while the space in front of him glinted with the harsh determination of life.

Futile, Fin supposed, but admirable.

The human spirit persisted, even in places such as this where life came to rest and where green withered and fell. Despite this, houses made of deep brown wood stood tall against the

howling north, and the flowers dotted the paths with shades of frosted purple. Footsteps had been paved in the snow, patted down to create branches of ice that led to houses and services alike.

Fin felt its feet slow and stop in the heart of the branches, the center of the village. An ache began to stir and settle in the sole of its feet, shoulders falling as it finally took a breath and *stopped*. Whatever had caused it to make its way here had either concluded, or—the more likely alternative—had been found. Yet, it could only see white in every direction, each color a shock to its system after the blank, frozen travelling it had endured on the way—

That, of course, was when it saw him.

Nothing special had been the first thought in its head.

Something incorrect had been the second.

The man walked across the snow as if floating, his elegance existing as if no weight had ever been placed upon his shoulders. Golden swirls surrounded his face whenever he breathed, the sun and the cold air conspiring together to create someone that, if Fin hadn't known better, it would call "angelic." Something about him, however, immediately set the being on edge. Time ticked strangely near him, as if the concept had forgotten the difference between "forward" and "back," as if it didn't wish to comply with him, or more accurately, as if it had the incessant *want* to comply and flex with his whims.

The man appeared to be gathering wood from a small alcove. A normal errand, all things considered, but despite that, Fin couldn't help but stare, and stare, and stare. The movements seemed too normal, too common, for the fear that gripped and beat its heart after years of sitting still. Something so inhuman doing such a human task...

After a moment, with his back to Fin, the man twitched and turned, finally, after the consistent, heavy weight of its eyes on him. That, later to be known as the first time of many, was when their eyes finally met: one an icy, dead brown, and the other a warm, flowing blue.

Fin had expected there to be confusion, perhaps wariness in the man's eyes. After all, most who met it either brushed it to the side, barely noticing its presence, or fled from the scene immediately, understanding that something about it could not be attributed to any human sense. Fin's gaze pierced further than surface level, after all, and most could understand that. Most were able to feel that within their being.

Not once had someone held Fin's gaze for longer than a minute.

And not once had someone *winked* at it.

Yet, when the man saw it staring, he did. He gazed back, straightened up to his full height, tugged his hat a bit further down as if he were a mere human, and he winked.

The man walked back inside the nearest building as Fin stood there, its breath freezing in the air as the lack of movement finally started to let the cold seep into its skin and bones as it shivered. Whether that was due to the cold or the man himself, it had no possible idea. The feeling of not knowing... god, it hadn't felt that way in what must have been years upon years. Not once had it bothered to care, so not once had it ventured so far as to find something it didn't understand. With millenia worth of information at its disposal, it had never been so...

Lost.

Without thinking, barely without noticing, Fin found itself carried forward to the door of the building the man had disappeared into once again. Even the wind seemed to push against its back, swirling and wrapping in such a way that carried the ticking of the clock to something more like a tune, a melody which pulled it in, tugging and whirling like it had lost its mind. Even

as another crack spread across its shoulder, it couldn't bring itself to mind, not when its hand instead reached up as to knock on the door.

Yet, no knock came.

Never, not once, had Fin felt so small in front of something so commonplace. The melody which filled its ears had lessened, slowly being lost from the wall between it and he. The apathetic ticking, once per pace, began to come back, began to fill its heart with the apathy it had known as long as it had been alive.

Its fist stayed in the air, unwavering.

Had this been the first time its curiosity had ever been piqued in such a way? Had it ever felt any kind of similar pull towards any goal, towards anyone, in... years? Once upon a time, a very, very long time, Fin had to have had some kind of desire: one for kindness, kinship, or love... Surely. While it was not a human on this globe, it once had the same feelings, the same ambitions as it did. It had grown among them, after all—lived and loved with them until the years passed and they were lowered into the dirt. It believed pieces of it had gone with those few. Pieces that were now either rotted, discarded, or placed back within the natural cycle.

Life and death. It knew the concepts well. In a way, that's all Fin was.

And yet.

And yet, and yet, and yet.

Someone on the other side of the door stood and stared back. Something had reached through to eternity, gazed upon it, and didn't flinch away. Whatever had been born from or through that man had hurt, sure, had hammered precise cracks into Fin's skin as if with a chisel and mallet. Cracks spread across its skin now, under its clothes, but that stood only as the reminder that something could interrupt eternity. Time had now been wrapped around someone's

finger in order to break and shatter that illusion of forever, and god, *god* maybe it made Fin finally feel alive.

With life came death. It knew that.

And yet, and yet, and yet.

The knock reverberated, and Fin bit down on its tongue hard enough that brittle, tangy copper sprung to life. Thoughts flooded its head, both of regret, of jumpstarted hope, and most potent of all, the vertigo that is associated with falling from a great height, a turn upwards that left it on uneven footing even as someone opened the door before it.

The tune Fin had heard earlier in the encounter loudened as the door swung open, a wide-eyed, red-cheeked woman standing in the opening. The smile on her face, as it could have guessed, slipped from her mouth as her hand shook, opening the door for it without a word. An old, numb feeling welled in its chest, a feeling it had long since thought it left behind in the years since its attachments—if you could call them that—crumbled into dust. The way people froze and fell apart before it still tried to tear at any exposed emotion Fin showed. That still made it ache: the knowledge that it could be nothing more than the exceptional *other*.

Whoever that man—that disruption—had been, however, had *seen* Fin.

It couldn't remember the last time it had been seen.

Maybe it didn't know how to even *be* seen.

The way it stumbled into the small gathering space, a pub of sorts, only highlighted that fact. Nothing had ever made it feel so off-kilter, so unnatural and ripped clean. The music pierced its ears, pinpricks stabbing with every note that roused the melody. It walked forward until the music waned out as the musicians at the front noticed its presence. The only sounds from within the pub came from a few clinking glasses and shuffles amongst whispers. Fin

stopped once it reached the stage, its eyes trailing over the instruments. From the music alone—still echoing and chiming in its head—Fin had assumed one of the players would have been the man. But, no, the musicians cowered and froze under its gaze, and so it turned to the crowd. Its heart plummeted as it met the same reaction from across the room.

“Where—”

The question did not come out as words. In fact, the phrase didn't come close to being completed as Fin's voice gave out into a breathy whisper. How long since it last spoke? Since it last tried to converse with someone, the spark of ambition and confusing, rupturing want in its chest? Too long, it supposed, as it turned its eyes to the ground, ignoring the people around it as it felt the smallest inkling of a breeze, of the slight cold wrapping around its exposed skin.

Quickly, Fin glanced up towards the source, the exit door cracked ever so slightly open, the wind snaking inside as a telltale sign. One of the patrons shivered, moving to close it, but before they could, Fin moved—quick enough that it hadn't noticed its own movement until it felt its grip tightening into the splintered wood. The stranger quickly stumbled back from the door, and Fin slammed it closed, unknowingly, completely and utterly distractedly, behind itself.

Footprints.

Fin felt its breath speed quicker at the evidence of life, following them as if it were a trail in which to keep the lost from wandering too far from home. The pub disappeared behind it, into the wisps of snow which curled up and wrapped around the retreating and finalized scene.

Then, the footsteps stopped.

Pattering out, they became more and more faint before they disappeared completely, leaving Fin to itself with its breaths labored with hot puffs of air swallowed by the cold. It stood there long enough that the cold rose above its shoes, trying to aid on the journey to envelop Fin

completely. Maybe it was working. It already felt the cold spreading inside with the loss of presence, the missing piece found and lost again.

Fin hadn't even known his name.

And yet something about him...

He hadn't looked away.

Fin did not try to count how many hours it stood in the cold. The sun fell and the moon rose, and the moon fell to chase after the sun soon after. The footsteps were washed over, but Fin continued to stare, the image of them imprinted on its mind.

Pain eventually shook it out of its stupor. Another crack, shuddering as it clinked and ran down its arm. Fin blinked, glancing down at the likely spot of the injury before its head snapped up again, a feeling it knew well—despite only feeling it once before—falling into place within its chest. Its legs began to move, guiding it with the sense to find whatever opposed eternity, whatever caused such harm and change and ambition and *hope*—

The snow fell away from its shoes as it began to walk again.

This time, surely, he wouldn't get away.

~*~