

Time Hiccup
by Aaron Blanshan

For a moment, the world lay still as if time itself had a hiccup. There was a chance to breathe as his senses started to catch up with him. The cold turned his breath to fog. The smell and taste of warm blood as it oozed out into his jeans. The sounds of light raindrops rolled off of his bloody face. Blurry vision started to fade away as he felt the car around him. All he felt was warm blood, dirt, and glass. He wasn't sure what just happened, but he knew it was bad.

The smell of warm pie blew into his nostrils as he knocked on the front door. The landscape seemed much less harsh in the day while the sun was still up, but he knew that once that sun went down, it became a death trap. They were the mountains where memories were made. He knocked on the door again. This time, he heard a barking dog followed by a fanfare of footsteps. The door was yanked open and there stood an old man and woman with smiles wide like the sky. No words followed, but the warm hugs and teary eyes said enough; He was finally home again.

No need to worry about how he got there, now he had to get out. He unclipped his seatbelt and tried to crawl to the closest window. The decision was immediately followed by a sharp pain in his right leg causing him to stop right in his tracks. He reached to the driver's door, but it seemed pinned. The door was not an option. The window and windshield seemed possible, but with his legs pinned against the wheel, he wasn't able to get out. Pain flooded his whole body as he tried to pull his leg out. He figured his best bet was to crawl out of the passenger seat window.

The war had changed him. His parents didn't recognize him. Same body, different person. For the past 7 months, he had completely forgot about his home and childhood. The intense stress of every day had turned him into a quiet man carrying memories that would haunt him for the rest of his life, but now that stress seemed to fade away because that was another world, far away, and here he was now. Sitting down to a home cooked meal with the parents that he hadn't seen for a long time. Wonderful smells filled the air as mashed potatoes, gravy, and chicken were set on the table. They sat in silence for a moment of prayer, then he ate a mouthful of warm potatoes.

He tasted blood in his mouth as he slithered over the console, he was aware of every pain in his body. From shards of glass stuck in his arm, the wrist he was unable to move. He kept pulling and moving until his leg was free. It didn't look good at all. He reached for the window and was able to pull himself up. He tried the door. It didn't budge. He got to his feet, tried to steady himself and stop his shaking as he rose

upward, but just collapsed. He should have known his leg wouldn't be able to hold all his weight. For a while, he lay still. Fog coming from his breath and blood from his leg. So again he tried. He got to his feet a second time being careful not to put any weight on his injured leg. He pushed at the door with all his might, and then, with the sound of twisting metal, the door popped open.

Dinner was over quickly and long conversations followed. They talked about their lives, news stories, jokes, and even the weather. It had been dry the last couple months and that was a godsend, but even rain is important at times. They stayed up late joking and enjoying what had been lost for so long, and when the time came, a bed was made for him in the back.

As he climbed up out of the car, he heard lightning. He looked down at the car and didn't recognize it. Wondering how he made it out of that twisted piece of scrap metal covered in blood, he lifted his feet out of the door and crashed down to the dirt below. He quickly pulled out his knife and sliced through the fabric that held his jacket sleeve on. Then he tied a tourniquet around his thigh as tight as possible. It hurt so much he couldn't sit up. He then started to pull out chunks of glass from his torso and arms. This hurt more than the impact of the crash and the tourniquet combined. He then took a look around. His car had gone off a steep slope, but if he went upward, he could get to the road.

There it was again. The same terrible dream that he had so many times. As he sat up in a puddle of sweat, he lay still watching the ceiling fan go around over and over. As he rolled over, ready to get up, he fell off the bed. He got to his feet and glanced at the clock. 1:26 AM. He got dressed and stumbled through the kitchen. He opened the fridge, pulled out the milk, and had a glass. Then, as quietly as he could, he put back the milk, got his keys, and hopped into his car waiting in the driveway. He was going for just a nice little drive to ease the memories that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

As he got to the top, of the hill, relief washed over him. The same feeling he had got when he walked into his home for the first time in a year. He was saved. All he had to do was flag down a car.

He took the long way. The long way followed a steep side of the cliff and had beautiful scenery at day, but, it had many dangerous switchbacks that would take his full attention as he speed through them. Besides, the views were invisible in the nighttime.

In the distance, he spotted a pair of headlights. A car, it was finally here!

Then, a man crawled out into the road ahead of him as he slammed on the brakes.

The car slammed on the brakes and slid right into the man and off the slope.

For a moment, the world lay still as if time itself had a hiccup.