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## Any Second

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## Any Second

### **Abstract**

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"There is rarely any warning, and when there is, it is never enough. Nobody plans an accident. They just happen. Sometimes, they change everything, right when it all seems safely written in stone."

### **Cover Page Footnote**

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# MARK FOTI

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## ANY SECOND

There is rarely any warning, and when there is, it is never enough. Nobody plans an accident. They just happen. Sometimes, they change everything, right when it all seems safely written in stone.

I had just begun to date one of my best friends. We may not have said it, but we were in love before December 4th, that special day; the day that is often referred back to as “our” day. Not even a month had passed since then, but we had become very comfortable together.

It was January 3rd. Her hometown is an hour and a half away from mine. We decided she would come visit me to celebrate our first month together. It may sound silly to others, but it was very serious to us. We were proud to be together. We wanted to celebrate and we could not wait a whole year. We had found something so special together. My girlfriend did not have a car, so I would have to pick her up. It had been snowing out earlier, and my mother warned against it, but the roads were not bad enough to cancel the drive. I told her everything would be fine and that I would be back later.

I arrived at my girlfriend’s house. She looked beautiful. We kissed and talked in her bed. Holding each other. Touching each other. We were both excited about what we had found and the future that lay before us. In the meantime, the snow started up again. It came down from the sky, lightly covering the streets. The difference was barely noticeable as the two of us left. What was different was the route. She knew a shortcut that avoided the thruway, and would save a half hour.

I had never taken the route before. It took us down a long, snow covered road that only had one lane in each direction. We would look at each other, and say how much we care about each other to pass the time—the whole time playing music on the new CD player my brother had installed in my car for Christmas.

The speed limit changed as we continued along. We were currently passing through a 55 miles per hour zone. I stayed about fifteen miles below that. It seemed like a safe compromise.

Eventually, I came up to a brown beat up car that was crawling along, forcing me to slow down to twenty miles per hour. At first, it did not affect me at all, but after a minute or so, I realized that this car had no intentions of being anywhere except in front of me. I had not come all this way only to be slowed down. After some time, I pulled into the incoming traffic lane and sped up to about forty-five, allowing myself to pass him. After doing so, I turned on my blinker and pulled my steering wheel slightly right so that the car would follow suite. It did. The car pulled back into the lane and I straightened the steering wheel out, expecting the car to do the same. This time, it did not listen.

The car continued to move sideways. It was sliding! In panic, I slammed the brakes. It made the back end of the car slide out even faster. The car was going straight off the road, and it only took a moment to realize that there was nothing I could do. There had been ice under that snow just waiting to take advantage of my impatience.

My girlfriend had begun to scream. I looked over to her for just an instant to see the pure fear in her eyes. She was looking at me as if she believed that I would stop it somehow. Just past her, I noticed a tree we were about to hit. In that moment before impact, I remembered high school.

I thought of my best friend Mathew. The two of us seemed to be calm in any situation, and use to insist we were "invincible." It began as a joke. We were simply poking fun at all those worried adults who would insist that teenagers were impractical and thought that nothing would happen to them. We embraced the stereotype. The scary thing is, many of our friends began to believe it. Even scarier, we began to believe it.

In that second before we hit the tree, I remembered this. I thought to myself, confused, in desperation that, "This may kill us . . . but it can't . . . We're invincible . . . right?" It almost calmed me, but my mind quickly answered, "No, you're not." That was the last thought I remember having before we hit.

The glass cracked into millions of little pieces and shattered inwards on her side. The pieces flew across, hitting the window on my side, and colliding with our faces along the way. The airbags busted out, and my head busted into it with the force of a train. It felt like I was having my head slammed into concrete.

Even though the glass was flying, even though the very metal frame within the car was being bent in, even though the air bags exploded and the tree cracked, I could hear nothing. As the destruction unraveled before my eyes, everything was silent. Not a sound was heard. Soon after, the darkness followed, and things would never be the same.

What had I done? I pictured my life, without me. My mother lying curled up on her bed, blaming herself. My father letting out the noise that could make the most hardened soul cry. Our families meeting under the most grotesque circumstances. I picture her father, alone. And I picture Mathew finding out that at least one of us was not quite as invincible as we thought.

We both awoke to my horn sounding off. The high pitched, unsettling noise became sweeter than music. It played us a message. It sang survival. It was the sound of life. It was glorious, angelic! Long after the rest of the details fade away, the feeling that sound gave me will remain. Anything that happened after that was irrelevant. The snow, the hospital, the weekend that followed, none of it was important. What was important was that we got to live. Whether it would be for a day or a hundred years, life never seemed more precious. Every second would count.

Besides a newfound appreciation for life, I had been struck with fear, humility, and understanding. Still stubborn as hell, I tried to reject it. I insisted that the accident *proved* my invincibility, especially when people tried to point the lesson out to me. It was impossible to ignore however. I was not untouchable. Those things that "will never happen to me" can happen to anybody. That is why they are considered accidents. I could no longer live life as if it would go on forever. I would live life one day at a time, and learn to enjoy it as if it could be my last, because it very well could.