

Every day I had ten minutes. From 11:16 to 11:26 I had ten minutes. My day was so packed with surgeries, meetings, conferences, you name it I was there. But the universe had somehow allowed me these ten minutes. It was like a glitch in the matrix that from 11:16 to 11:26 I was free.

I remember the first time I discovered my magical ten minutes, I'm sure it was always there but I remember the first time I noticed it. It was my second year of residency at Saint Peters Hospital, back when hearing "Doctor Mason" still gave me goosebumps.

It was in October and there was this freak snowstorm that came out of nowhere. It was one of those snowstorms that comes and suddenly everyone forgets how to drive, like it's the first time this ungodly substance has ever entered the earth and every lesson behind the wheel we've learned is forgotten. One of those ones.

There was a crash, one of many I'm sure, but the poor guy behind the wheel of this Sudan got t-boned by some Cadillac who forgot what ice was ended up in Saint Peters. They rushed him into the E.R and there I was, ready to respond, like a jaguar waiting to pounce on its prey. He got into surgery conscious at around 11:03 and left surgery dead at 11:14. The first thing I noticed was his head was bleeding pretty traumatically. His face went into the steering wheel and his teeth went right through his bottom lip like it was paper. He had a few broken ribs and a punctured lung. I didn't know that then though.

I heard him say "my girls, my girls" as they put him under. I didn't think about it much I had a job to do. The first thing they tell you in medical school is to remove yourself from these people and view them as puzzles. You're solving a puzzle not saving a life. It's less pressure that way.

I can't tell you what all of the doctors were doing as they tried to stabilize this man's condition, but I'll tell you that I missed that punctured lung. He couldn't breathe and I didn't even notice.

"It happens James."

"Nothing you can do James; we tried our best."

"That guy was done the second his head hit the wheel Mason, don't beat yourself up."

The thing is I didn't beat myself up. They announced his death, I shook my head, washed my hands, and was ready to get on with my day. But then the world stopped. There was absolutely nothing for ten minutes. No one talked to me, it was like I was invisible.

At first, I felt like it was a curse, like this guy who wanted to get back to his girls stopped time and space just to make me feel it. Those ten minutes were hell for the first few days, I would go into the supply closet and just ball my eyes out.

I don't do that anymore.

No, now those ten minutes are my time. Those ten minutes are for me to breathe. I don't cry anymore, no, what I do now is I watch.

About a month after the car crash, I had gotten used to these ten minutes, I would spend them walking around, or in the supply closet, but that got cramped.

On the seventh floor in Saint Peters there's an old unused wing. It used to be for all the sick kids who would come in. The walls are covered with looney toons and mickey mouse dressed as a doctor as if to say, "cancer is more fun when you're with Mickey!"

Some rich philanthropist whose kid had a suboptimal time in the wing had since donated a bunch of money to build a new cancer ward. So the seventh floor had become a ghost town, or

it was sometimes used for overflow when people were feeling especially eager to stay in the hospital.

It was comfortable, dusty, creepy. Really the perfect place for a guy with ten spare minutes a day. After a few weeks of walking in and out of the seventh floor rooms, I decided to set up a cozy sit down spot in room 723.

Before Saint Peters was an old hospital, it was an old Catholic church. Good ol' Saint Pete came in and baptized the whole neighbourhood. I've heard the old church once had the biggest congregation in town. They would be packed to the spires with bodies just itching to hear the good word.

Room 723 had a great lifeguard chair view of Saint Peters Cathedral, as my Mom called it. The view was ultimately the reason why I settled there. When I was younger, Mom took me to mass every Sunday. I can't remember much other than the old musty smell coming from the pews, but time with Mom was worth its weight in gold. If I sat quiet and sang the hymns, I would get one of those cellophane wrapped caramels. The ones that you try and open slowly to not make so much noise but end up bursting the eardrums of everyone in the place.

Then Mom got sick. She got sick fast.

The Mom I once had disappeared before her life did. She never had time for anything other than surviving. The doctors said it was a lost cause. Nothing we could do. Don't hold out for a miracle. Get your affairs in order. All the wonderful uplifting stuff that comes with being a steward of death.

I guess you could say that's why I became a doctor. At least that's what I told them in my interview for med school. Cry a little, say you want to change the world, say you never want a

kid to go through what you went through. They eat that up faster than I would eat my caramel at church.

I haven't been back to Saint Peters since Moms funeral. What's the point of singing hymns to the guy who took your mom away? Sometimes I would wish she was shot or hit by a car. Sickness seemed so purposeful. Like God gave it to her on for a "reason".

Even with my obvious resentment to the man upstairs. I still liked my birds eye view in Room 723. If I were poetic, I'd say it's because it put me above the church. Made me feel on top for once. The reality is I liked the architecture and I liked watching this old blind man.

Every single day since I discovered the view, he'd be out in front of the church. He parked himself in front of the "Visitors Appreciated" plaque and held out his hat. He was like a blind man out of a movie. Dark black circular glasses, a black bowler hat. I could count the strands of untidy, greasy white hair he had slicked onto his head. He wore a Long brown overcoat that looked like it had seen its fair share of winters. I figured he was homeless because he wore this every single day without fail.

In all honestly there wasn't anything particularly interesting about this man. But I was taken with him. I couldn't stop watching him. Every single 10 minutes from 11:16-11:26, I felt like it was our time. He didn't know I was there, but I felt connected to him.

In the ten minutes I watched him he would always do the same three things. Around 11:18 he would stand up from his spot and run his hands down the wall of the church. He'd return to his perch at 11:20 where he would take a pocket-sized brail bible from his coat and do what the blind equivalent to reading is for about five minutes. The last thing he would do is when my pager would go off, as it always did, at 11:26, he would look right into my window. Every single day without fail he would do this.

The first time it happened it really freaked me out. It was like he caught me doing something dirty. It took me a minute to remember that he was blind and can't "look" at anything, let alone into my window. Still, I was paranoid, and I would test it from time to time. I would wave, hit the window, flip him off. He just stared right through.

This is what my life had become. Every day I would see him for ten minutes and this pathetically became what I looked forward too. I craved those ten minutes and they always went too fast. I would blink and there was my pager beckoning me back to work.

It became a pretty comfortable routine until like all comfortable routines, life decides to unsettle it. Shift the balance, throw a wrench in the mundane peace you've developed.

One day at 11:19, just as the old man was running his hands along the church three kids came around the corner. There were always kids messing around by the church and hospital. It's in an older part of town where no one really cares about graffiti and broken glass.

I guess these certain kids were tired of throwing beer bottles against walls and were looking for a more exciting morning.

I could see them yelling at the old man, trying to get a rise out of him. I almost thought it was humorous. In my mind the old man was solid as stone and nothing could phase him.

He stood peacefully, still running his fingers along the wall of the church when the yelling lost its flavor too. I watched like a wounded dog as a tall boy picked up a rock and hurled it at the man. It connected with the back of his head sending the front of his skull into the cold hard walls of the church. He collapsed, much to the amusement of the other boys who approached my blind friend,

I stood in a trance as they went through his pockets, they threw his brail bible into the snow and then began to kick him like it was his fault he had nothing else.

I finally got enough of my senses to shout from seven stories up at a window. Didn't do much. So, I ran. I ran down the seven flights of stairs and out of the back-west door of the hospital. At best, it took me three minutes. The kids heard the door open and scrambled before I could even get a word out in between my heaving breaths.

There was a lot more blood than I would've liked to see on the snow surrounding the blind man. It was mostly coming from his head. Heads bleed a lot.

It was at this point the instincts and adrenaline kicked in. All the training and repetition takes over and you're not even thinking, you just begin to act. I remember assessing his vitals and making the split-second decision that he had enough time for me to personally carry him into the ER. I lifted him being very careful with the neck. From my angle it looked like he hit his head pretty hard. Could be concussed. I need to be careful with the brain.

Seeing the blood fill his body shaped impact in the snow is the last thing I clearly remember of being outside. Getting him in the hospital was priority, nothing else remotely mattered.

Luckily, I got there before any major bleeding could occur. His conditions stabilized quickly as the army of nurses and doctors rushed in like ants, each with a specific purpose. I stood at his head barking orders. Yelling at the nurses to hurry.

Usually hospital life isn't this dramatic, but this time it felt like there was so much at stake. I didn't feel like I could really breathe until I heard the steady robotic song of his heart monitor.

"You know this guy James?" Nurse Troy asked me. He was a male nurse, a rarity at Saint Peters. He took a lot of crap for it, but he held his own. He grew up in a rough part of Boston. The kind of place where Friday nights were only Friday nights if you made some schmuck eat

his own teeth. No one ever pushed him too hard. Despite his upbringing, he was cool and collected and I liked when he was in the emergency rooms with me. Someone you can trust goes a long way.

“Never met him before in my life.”

“Huh. The way you were yelling I would’ve thought this guy was your dad or something.” Nurse Troy said this passively as he washed his hands and exited the room. He liked to say what he was thinking but never liked sticking around to hear your two cents.

I left the blind man in the care of a capable young nurse I had seen around but never talked too. I told her that I would personally see to this man and that she should page me when he woke up. I learned the nurse’s name was Peggy. Sweet girl.

It was about three hours later when Peggy paged me saying he’s up and talking. I was surprised. I figured he’d be out for at least six hours. Old guys like him don’t love being conscious as is.

He was moved to the fourth floor, into room 417. The fourth floor was dreary, ugly, smelt bad. A real hospital y’know?

My old friend was sitting up and eating one of those fluorescent Jell-O cups that hospitals seem to have an infinite supply of. I remember when I used to come visit Mom in the hospital, I’d always ask for hers. Looking back, I swear she hesitated every time. I guess when you’re dying you really cherish the little luxuries.

I knocked on the door and the old man turned his head to the doorway. I thought it was odd since he was blind, but I guess you can’t turn your ears.

His dark round glasses were no longer on and I saw his eyes for the first time. They were a milky grey color that oddly matched the wallpaper in the room. I approached his bed side and

grabbed the chart hanging off the foot of his bed. His name is Roger. Roger McCleary. Which was an old man's name if I've ever heard one.

"I'm Doctor Mason. You had a pretty rough afternoon; do you remember much?"

The old man put his Jell-O cup down on the little tray that sat across his lap. He adjusted himself and his hospital robes like he was trying to make himself modest.

"May I touch your hand Doctor Mason? I can't see awfully well, and I feel better talking to someone whom I'm touching. Is that alright?"

I figured this was not an unusual request from a blind man. I moved closer to his table and placed my hand on his. He had old people hands. The type where the skin is like a latex glove over bones and arteries. His hand was surprisingly warm when I touched it. He instantly grasped me hand in a type of handshake and brought his other hand over with some effort, sandwiching mine in between his.

"Are you doing well today Doctor Mason? I'm sure it must be difficult working here at the hospital." He spoke softly and slowly, like each word really mattered. I couldn't help but smile at his immediate politeness. I don't usually smile at work.

"I'm... I'm doing well Roger thank you, but I'm here to talk about how you're doing."

"Ah. Yes," Roger Nodded like he had forgotten, it was his turn to smile. "We all just need a checkup every now and again don't we?" He squeezed my hand lightly.

"I guess you're right." I began, "Now how are you feeling? Do you remember what happened?"

Roger furrowed his brow; I could tell just from looking at him that his head was aching. He was trying not to show it. He was tough.

"Well my head has seen better days and my side is paining me a tad."



I figured.

“And I can’t seem to remember much after I saw those boys come around the corner.”

“Those boys were harassing you rather harshly Roger. They began throwing rocks and tried to rob you.”

This was highly amusing to Roger. He chuckled softly.

“Rob me? Well that must have been a frustrating task indeed, I can see why they were so upset.”

“Yes. They were and they injured your head, you’re concussed, and they broke and bruised three of your ribs.”

Roger took this news like I was telling him the weekly forecast.

“Yes, that explains it. Say, did anyone take my brail bible? It’s white and…”

“I know the one.” I interjected almost involuntarily. “I don’t see it in here, it may still be outside by the church, the boys took it from your pocket when they tried to rob you. I guess they didn’t see much value in it.”

“That’s where they’re wrong.” Roger smiled. “That’s where they’re wrong” He repeated in a quiet whisper.

We sat for a moment. Roger thinking about his brail bible, me thinking about this strange man I’ve found. Roger broke the silence.

“May I ask if you saw these boys attempt to hurt me?”

I began to tell Roger about how I saw. I told him about how I would watch him daily. How I watched him read his bible, run his hands on the church walls. The strange thing was, I felt no problem doing it. No awkwardness at all. The truth almost spilled out of me. I felt safe with him.

He listened well as I told him, showing no emotion other than kindness. Keeping my hand in his.

“I had a sense someone was watching me you know” Roger said mildly. “I always liked to picture it was my Savior keeping an eye out for me.” He paused for a moment of reflection. “I guess in a sense he was. If you were not watching, it is likely I would not have been found in time.”

“You know it’s funny” I began, “I thought you saw me in my window a few times... you’d always look up.”

As I said this Rogers eyes rolled back in his head and his grasp slackened on my hand. He began convulsing rapidly, shaking the tray on his bed, foam filled his mouth as he gurgled. Seizure.

I moved the tray and yelled for a nurse. Peggy was close by and rushed in. We monitored him making sure his head was safe from any violent contact. His brain was in a fragile state and any heavy contact could prove fatal.

The seizure stopped as suddenly as it began, and Roger was unconscious once more. The heart monitor returned to its rhythmic beeping. I told Peggy to again page me when he was awake and left the room.

I went back to the west door on the other side of the hospital. It was about six o’clock now and the sun was setting. Not that I could see the sunset wedged in between the church and hospital, but I could see the sky.

The dropping sun painted the clouds a pinky orange that made them look like cotton candy. The sky behind contrasted it nicely with its royal blue.

I walked back to the spot where I picked up Roger. The blood had dried in the snow leaving it a gruesome blackish red colour. About two feet to the left of the blood lying perfectly flat on its back was Rogers white brail bible. It was like someone had gently placed it there.

I picked it up expecting to see some water damage at the very least, but it was dry. It was in perfect condition. Roger would be happy to hear.

It was about two hours before Roger woke up again. I was off duty but still at the hospital when Peggy paged me. I was never really in much of a rush when my shift ended. I didn't have much to go home too.

I went back to Rogers room, he sat in the same position he was in before he seized.

“Ah Dr. Mason, good to see you again.”

He said this right as I walked in the door.

“How did you know it was me?”

“I didn't.” He chuckled. “I've said that to the last four nurses who've come in.”

“I found your bible outside.”

Rogers face lit up like a little kid whose mom said he could choose a candy from the grocery store.

“Oh, that is wonderful news, thank you Dr. Mason.”

Roger reached out his hand, I grabbed the bible from my pocket and placed it in his. He took it with the same delicacy a mother takes her new child. He first ran his fingers over the front and back covers, and then the binding. He sighed a breath of relief and then opened it. He ran his fingers along the pages and as he did, he smiled and looked upward. It must be interesting reading with your hands.

“You really love that thing huh?” I asked in fascination.

“Yes.” Roger answered simply, he closed the book and placed it on his tray. “May I hold your hand again Dr. Mason?”

I approached and he once again trapped my hand in between his leathery gloves. Again, with some effort. I could tell the position of having one arm draped over his chest was causing him significant pain. I tried to raise my hand into a more comfortable position for him, but he was stubborn without words. This is how he wanted to sit.

“Do you talk to God Dr. Mason?”

“Like pray?”

“No... not quite. Anyone can say a prayer, prayers can be recited and sung, but only you can have a real conversation with God.”

I thought about it for a moment. “No, I don’t think I ever have had a real conversation with the guy.”

Roger nodded his head. We sat in silence for a few moments.

“Dr. Mason we haven’t known each other for very long have we?”

“No, we haven’t. We just met today in fact.”

Though I said this as a matter of fact, it felt like a lie. In a sense we had only met today, but I felt like I had known Roger forever. It felt like I was in a room with an old friend. It didn’t make sense.

“I don’t know why Dr. Mason, but I feel close to you. I also don’t know why, but I feel like I need to tell you a few things.”

I looked at Roger, not saying a word, almost afraid to interrupt his train of thought.

“You are a surgeon correct?”

I nodded. Then realized he couldn't see me nodding.

"Yes. I am a surgeon."

"Nurse Peggy told me you are one of the most sought-after surgeons in the country."

I smiled. "Nurse Peggy may exaggerate a bit."

"Dr. Mason, do you read much of the bible?"

"Truth is Roger, yours is the first bible I've picked up since I was a boy"

"Do you know much about Jesus Christ?"

I didn't love where this conversation was going, but I obliged.

"Yeah, son of god, healed the sick, made the blind see, raised the dead. Quality guy."

This amused Roger.

"Yes, a quality guy indeed. Dr. Mason do you know what He said to His followers after He did those things? He said, 'greater works than these shall you do'."

At this point, the air in the room had gotten heavy and my heart was pumping.

"Dr. Mason I don't think Christ literally meant that all of us would perform greater miracles with our own hands. Some have I'm sure, but I do not think that is the rule, rather it is the exception."

Roger paused. The sun had completely set by now and we were left in the artificial glow of hospital lights. It was like it was only Roger and I in the whole hospital. He squeezed my hand tighter and continued.

"I think Christ is saying that He places the value. He is the only one who determines how great our works truly are. He knows we will not be able to save everyone as He did. But when we try lift any insignificant person who walks this earth, He sees that as a greater work simply because we are trying."

I stared at Roger as a tear formed in his gray sightless eyes and trickled down his cheek. His voice became shakier and he began to pat my hand slowly.

“You see. He loves us each deeply, He views us a child learning to walk, any attempt is applauded.”

I opened my mouth to speak and choked on my emotions. I fought the urge to cry with him.

“What if...what if I’m not trying enough... to be considered great?”

“Dr. Mason you have done many valiant things in this hospital, and none of those things are the reason Christ see’s greatness in you. You don’t need to do anything exceptional to be worthy of love. He loves you simply because you exist.”

I don’t know what it was about those words in that order. It might have been the drama of the day or the culmination of events since I first saw Roger on the street. Whatever it was I heard those words differently than I’ve ever heard words before. It was more than just an auditory experience; it was like they were written onto my heart.

“Now. Dr. Mason, if you don’t mind, I’ve had quite the day. I would like to get some rest.”

In a split second I was brought back to the reality of the hospital.

“Of course, Roger. Of course.”

I arose and he released me from his hands.

“If you need anything just call a nurse, I’ll check on you first thing tomorrow.”

Roger nodded, pushed the tray over his lap to the side and began to try and find the least painful position to sleep in. I walked to the door and hesitated to exit. I wanted this moment to last as long as it could. I turned and took another look at my blind friend.

“Thank you... for saying those things Roger.”

I turned to exit once more, just as I walked out, I heard Roger say, “Talk to Him James. He misses you.”

It wasn't until I was home in my own bed that I realized I had never told Roger my first name. He hadn't used it until I left.

I didn't sleep much that night. It was unlike any restless night I have had before; I wasn't preoccupied with work or worry. I was just at peace.

When I came into the hospital next morning Nurse Peggy was taking the sheets off of Rogers bed. He was gone. I wasn't overly sad about it and in a way, I almost expected it. I felt like he had done all he needed to do and was probably pretty excited to be seeing again.

Nurse Peggy told me they weren't sure what happened to him. No seizure, no aneurism, he just kind of left. Peggy said the night nurse had never seen a dead person so at peace before, it was almost beautiful.

I still have the ten minutes every day from 11:16 to 11:26 but I don't go to the seventh floor to watch an old blind man anymore. No, I go up to the seventh floor and I open my own pocket bible. I like to read that verse that Roger showed me, the one where Jesus says we will do greater works than He did. After I read, I get down on my knees, but I don't pray, I just start talking. The thing is once I started talking, I realized something. I realized that I had missed Him too.