

The Rush
By Rebecca Fisher
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If you walk to the far side of the street and feel the rush of wind on your face, there's no going back. You know that no one will feel what you feel as you step one foot down from the curb, onto the asphalt and feel your weight shift forward. Your pulse starts to rise and the thrill from the sound of the cars speeding by grows and grows. You close your eyes, just for a bit, and breathe in the air as it swirls with each turn of the wheel. You look both ways, the way you were taught as a child, and wait for the perfect moment. Cars are parked along the street, a sure block to your sight of what will come from each side, but there's not a thing to stop you from one more step. You feel sure that you'll make it through. You've done it and come out alive, with pride and a high like no one could understand until they do it themselves. So you do it. You step out in faith and are shot back by the loud scream of a car's horn as it flies by. That was close. You fall back onto the curb with a laugh of shock, but jump back up fast with not a thing but sheer adrenaline. You lean out and take one last look. It looks clear. You run this time and make it half way through the lane when it all goes black.

You don't know the last time you tried this. You don't know why. Your head hurts. Why do they ask so many questions? You've got one leg in a cast and your head in a wrap, but their eyes are on your mind. What are you up to in there? What made you do it? Don't they know? How can you tell them what it feels like to rush through the street, walk on air, fly like a bird, make it to the end with life still in your hands? They'll keep you here if you don't stop. So you say you will, so you can go home. They say you

could have died if it had hit you any other way. But it didn't, and you're not going to die. She says she'll leave if you don't stop, so you say of course you'll stop, but the truth is you don't care if she leaves and you can't stop.

When the lights go out and she goes to bed, you can't sleep. You lie still, afraid that if you don't do it now or try one more time, you won't go back out of fear. You sneak out of the door that squeaks each time it swings shut, down the hall with floors that creak with each step you take, out the glass door, with the key lock that you can't get right for minutes, and out onto the street. It's cold and dark, but cars are still out and fly by at just the right speed. Your pulse starts up as you lift your foot, the one in the cast, straight up, as it won't move any other way, and step off of the curb. You look at your toes, protruding from the white casing, and know it could be much worse next time...but you go for it. Things go black half way through the street. Your eyes struggle to fix on a red light that rolls round and round behind you. A small, but kind face is wrong side up on the ground next to you. It looks at you with care, but she's done and you know and she knows; it's over. She makes sure they get you in and drive you off. You can see her arms hug her chest in the cold air, her breath visibly short, as the loud siren blows down the street.

They want to know why, but you can't say. You don't know or you would tell them. But you know if you get out, you'll do it one more time, and then one more time if you can, 'cause next time you won't get hit. If they could just feel what you feel they'd know and take you home and she'd be there too.

The office was a block away, across the street, and the light was the longest in the city. Looking at his watch, Jay noticed he had five minutes to get to the three minute light, cross the street, travel back 20 yards to the office and ride the elevator to the fourth floor. He was tired of running late.

Every morning had gotten progressively worse since the affair. It would start out with silence, and while heading toward the door, would end up a screaming, tearful debate about fault, neglect and unhappiness. He tried to shake off the event each time with a double latte and the four-block walk to the office. They had one car, but lived conveniently close to his work.

His new, leather shoes had created a miserable, unrelenting blister on his right heel, and his pants had been rubbing against his side for weeks since he had begun to lose weight. The dark circles under his gray eyes told of the sleepless nights, next to a resentful, frustrated and defeated wife. His light brown hair was beginning to show traces of age and stress. A life of duty, responsibility and obligation molded a face with no purpose, no life, and no hope. Somehow life had become unmanageable, and it was spiraling quickly downward.

He knew that if he just finished that project with the desired outcome, he would get that raise, buy that car, feel like a man and life would be good again. The fights would end, the blisters would disappear, and things would change. But none of these things would come to pass if he didn't get through that door by 8:30. Knowing he would never make it across the street in time, it dawned on him that there was a quicker, easier way.

He stopped and looked across the street. It was a short distance across, and the traffic followed a predictable pattern, quite consistently. It was a busy street, and he understood the danger involved, but it would save him time, reputation and ultimately, his life.

His mind was made up. He would wait for the traffic to slow at the light and he would inch his way out, waving in gratitude as the cars let him skinny by. Once to the island divider, the other side would be clear and he would be home free. He gripped his latte and briefcase and stepped onto the pavement. A rush of adrenaline flowed quickly to his head; his temples throbbed. His heart began to race and he frantically stepped back onto the sidewalk. He felt childish for fearing what seemed a simple task. Gathering his courage he stepped down again, this time with both feet. The woman in the old, green, economy sized car unnecessarily jumped on her brakes and shook her head. The others followed with less of a look of judgment, as they too were in a Monday morning hustle. He was but another stop on their mindless odyssey to work. Passing the final two lanes was easier than the first. He reached the island and was so filled with a sense of victory that he couldn't catch his breath. He looked behind at his accomplishment, laughed out loud and gave an overjoyed "Woo hoo!" He was free and clear to run across the final stretch.

The smile on his face lingered through the lobby, up the elevator and into the office. He swung the doors open and entered like one would a game show stage, ready to win it all.

"Hey, Jay. What are you excited about? It's Monday, didn't you get the memo?"

His co-worker Bob was an overweight, middle-aged man with a hungry wife and four children. Work was work to Bob, because he wasn't moving up and he wasn't

moving out. It was a routine; nothing to get excited about, but Jay knew he was different than Bob. He was going places; he was going to be someone. “Poor sucker” he thought.

“What’s happenin, Bob? Didn’t you hear the birds chirpin on your way in, big guy?” Jay winked at Bob and Bob gave him his interpretation of a bird singing with his finger raised high in the air.

Jay’s heart hadn’t quite slowed from the rush and he chuckled once more, recalling the risk he had taken moments before. He sat at his desk and felt surprisingly charged and ready to tackle the day. The thoughts of the fight at home were no longer lingering, his blister didn’t hurt and he was proud of his loose pants. Inspiration flooded his cubicle as he opened his company email.

Cutting across traffic had become part of the morning routine. Sometimes he would startle drivers who could barely stop in time, and sometimes nobody paid a bit of attention to him. The excitement had started to wear off and it became less and less of a rush. The extra time he saved himself by cutting was slowly decreasing as he spent the few cushioned minutes adding a complaint or two in the argument at home, or taking a little longer in the coffee shops with the cute baristas. He was back to his grumpy self on Mondays, along with his self-righteous attitude about the incompetent morons he was forced to work with.

Tuesday morning was the same, as he moved on his way down the street. He had stopped looking for the cars and just arrogantly stepped into the street, knowing they would stop. He got to the island and casually crossed over. As he walked toward the

office, thinking about how he would file for divorce if he didn't know for sure he'd get taken in the process, he heard a strange siren behind him. It was a police officer, and for some reason he seemed interested in Jay. The cop parked his bike and climbed off. Jay waited impatiently to assist.

“Sir, you do realize that jay-walking is illegal, right?” The officer reached for a book and a pen.

“Oh, yes officer, I understand. I just thought I'd cut over really quick while the traffic was slow. It'll never happen again, I can promise you that.” Jay was filled with anger. Why was this jerk wasting his time with trivial issues like this when there were real criminals out there?

“Sir, many people die every year being struck by cars, doing just what you're doing now. I'm going to give you a ticket and hope that I don't see you again.” He left no room for Jay to argue. He handed him the ticket and gave an insincere, “Have a nice day” and drove away. Jay cursed under his breath and gave Bob hell the rest of the day.

Jay was meeting the guys at a pool hall for a much needed night out. He felt he had earned it, for being the breadwinner, tolerating her nagging and excelling despite the crappy hand he was dealt in life. He took a bus to the downtown area and began to walk toward the hall. He noticed traffic was slow and decided to cut across to avoid another needless wait at a light. He was only ten yards from the intersection, but thought it would save him time anyway. He stepped out into the street while checking his new sports

jacket for lint or cat hair. Brakes screeched and pain shot through his body. Lights flashed and he was out.

When he came to, his wife was crying at the foot of the bed and a doctor was reading a chart. His body ached all over as if he had been rolled over by a truck. He tried desperately to recall where he had been, what had happened and how he ended up there. She looked up and saw his eyes were opened. She began to cry uncontrollably.

“Well, hello there, son. Looks like you were pretty lucky. You’ve got a broken leg and slight concussion, but you should be fine in no time. I’d suggest staying out of the streets though.” The doctor chuckled with all seriousness. She continued to cry.

He remembered stepping into the street, the pain and then black. He filled with rage. That woman had been careless enough to run right into him. The police took his report and informed him that the woman’s report was quite different. They told him that she recalled him stepping into the street without warning and she couldn’t stop. They also had evidence of his previous ticket. The warnings and threats came in like waves. His head hurt. Jay knew it was her fault, but he was going to let it go. He made promises to his wife about being careful and using crosswalks, but he knew he had just run into some bad luck. He knew it wouldn’t happen the next time.

After a week off of work, Jay had fallen behind. He spent a month struggling to catch up, and with determination and hard work he managed to do so. He had faithfully been using the crosswalk every morning, feeling it was worth it to get her off his back. He knew she had been following him for days. Wednesday morning, on his lunch break,

he walked from the sub shop, down the street, toward the light. Suddenly he looked across the street and couldn't believe the desire he had to cut across. He remembered his promises and his leg still ached from the accident, but he wanted and needed to do it. The excitement was fresh, as he had never cut this way before. He didn't know the patterns of traffic from that side and the challenge became too much to pass up. Without thinking or looking he ran halfway through the street.

Upon awakening, he found himself in a dark room. He couldn't make out much but a consistent beeping sound. He recognized the bed, the gown, and the smell. In a panic and unable to move, he passed out.

The doctors said he'd be in a wheel chair until his spine could heal properly. The nurses treated him like a child. His wife cried and cried. Co-workers visited, bringing sympathy cards, but no sympathy. They all knew why his leg had been broken before. They all knew why he was in the hospital recovering. A million times over the question came. Why had he done it? Why had he done it? It rang in his ears again and again, and he didn't have an answer. He just knew that the urge that had come over him the moment he decided to cross was too overwhelming to resist. He knew that nothing could have talked him out of it. He swore, to them all, that he wouldn't do it again.

Months passed and he recovered; though a limp lingered as a scolding reminder. He hadn't cut across since the accident. He hadn't really had the chance. Therapy, bed

rest and time off of work had kept him out of the street. His work decided to let him come back, with one stipulation; if he were ever caught cutting again, he'd be immediately terminated. He did well with the lower position they offered him and in time he had worked himself back up the ranks, but they all looked at him with reservation, pity, and confusion. She dropped him off every morning and clung to him before he left the car. Her eyes were filled with fearful tears when he closed the door. He hated her for it. She wouldn't let it go, so he couldn't let it go. He was fine and didn't know why people couldn't believe in him. He was fine.

Jay's self esteem was diminishing. He no longer found any pleasure at work, and he was talking again to other women without any luck. He decided to begin walking to work again, to build his strength. Hesitantly his wife agreed, but followed him undercover for weeks. Anger built in him from the lack of trust. Resentments grew wildly toward the limits they all placed on him. He threatened to leave if she followed him even five feet.

He decided, again, that he would dedicate every bit of energy toward work. Success would come, he would get that car, the fighting would stop and he'd feel like a man. The belief that life could be good again gave him a new strength.

He walked to work that morning, not noticing his limp, ignoring the blister, smiling and winking at the ladies - empowered once again as he sipped his latte. Determined to find true happiness, he swung his briefcase over his shoulder. Powerless over himself, he turned and looked across the street.