

Junior Poetry
First Place
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How long are you going to watch this happen?

You remember her. She was so sweet, a girl with a smile brighter than the sun.

You remember she passed colorful cookies out to people on Christmas.

She let you have two because “you looked sad!” and cheered you up with a grin and a pat on the shoulder.

And here she stands in front of you, being ridiculed and bullied, bruised and battered, in pain.

Just because she wears a hijab.

Her bright smile is gone, replaced by swollen, purple marks all over her face.

She’s looking up at you, silently begging you to stop, to help, and yet you raise your fist again.

Because *they* told you to.

Is their desire to see her suffer worth her innocence? Her happiness? Her trust?

Tick. Tock.

You see them rush out of an alleyway, laughing, a few with baseball bats in hand.

You duck out of sight, your heart races in your chest.

What if *they* make you hurt someone again? What if *they did* hurt someone again?

You approach the alley.

There’s a man on the ground with a blue, pink, and white striped pin on his shirt.

He’s shaking and shivering like a leaf in the breeze, a blue bruise is starting to bloom over his eye.

You want to help.

But is it safe?

You could be targeted, too. Are you willing to risk it?

Your hands shake, sweat drips down the back of your neck.

No. You can't. It's too dangerous. And so, you walk away.

You know it will haunt you forever.

Tick. Tock.

Now it's somebody else being harassed, right in the middle of the sidewalk.

You remember the victim helped you up once, when you tripped over a crack in the pavement.

Now he's the one that needs help.

Are you going to give it to him?

Tick. Tock.

There are people, too. There are people walking right around him, averting their gazes.

They're scared. They're scared that *they* might target them too.

You can see it in their downcast eyes, their slumped shoulders, how fast they walk past.

They want to help, but they're scared.

Just like you are.

Tick. Tock.

So many people are being pushed down and oppressed right in front of you.

You could help, you know you could, but is it worth the risk?

Tick. Tock.

Should you try to save him or should you turn away and live with the guilt forever?

If you don't try to help now, you know you'll never have the courage to try again.

Tick. Tock.

How long are you going to let this happen?

If you don't stand up, if nobody will, then these people will always be suffering.

If you do speak out, maybe others will speak out with you.

Time's running out, you have to make your choice right here and now.

What will it be?

Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock, Tick, Tock-

"Stop!"

Silence.

They turn to you, their earlier victim forgotten.

You swallow, heart jumping out of your chest, but you stare back at them in defiance.

The bystanders on the sidewalk look at you with wide eyes, and you think you can see gratitude and relief in some of their faces.

Maybe this is where change begins.