

One Minute

By Annika Sage Ellis

A minute isn't that long, you think. What important thing could possibly happen in one minute? Unbeknownst to you, a lot of important things happen in one minute, and they would be known to you, if only you stopped to think about them. But you don't.

You set a timer for one minute. Or you watch the clock on the wall. Or you don't look at anything at all, and simply count to sixty, in a rough approximation of a minute. So what if I don't count my seconds perfectly? you think. What's a one second difference in a minute?

You set your timer, or watch your clock, or count. You sit, or you stand, or you lie on the floor. For one minute. Here is what happens.

You feel odd. You have been waiting a long time for a minute to be over. Surely, it's been a minute now, you think. But it has only been ten seconds. You close your eyes. A minute can't be that long, you think. When you take a breath and open your eyes, the minute will be over! You open your eyes.

It has only been five seconds since you closed them.

It's very rude for a minute to last this long, you think, frustrated. I have things to do! I can't be expected to wait for a minute to be over all day. You try to stand up, or sit up, or walk away, but you cannot do any of these things. It hasn't been a minute.

Your timer resets, your clock turns back, you lose your place and have to begin counting all over again. You are stuck. For one minute.

You hear a sound. It is not the ticking of the clock, the beeping of the timer, the tapping of your foot, the beating of your heart, or wheeze of your hoarse, unstable breathing. It is a sound

like a voice, but you are not speaking. And you realize the voice isn't speaking either—it is singing. The voice hums a song into your ear. At the same time, it sounds very far away. The song is *so* beautiful. It nearly moves you to tears.

It almost distracts you from the fact that all of your doors are locked, and you are alone.

You are afraid, but you don't want to move, for fear of resetting the minute. The song abruptly stops. You are both grateful and saddened by this. There is an empty hole in your heart that the song once filled. You wish it would come back. You hope it's gone forever.

It has been thirty-two seconds.

You are bored, now, waiting for the minute to be over. At least the song gave you something to listen to. Now, you have nothing to do, nothing else to focus on, but the minute. At least I'm halfway there, you think. Nothing much has happened at all. Nothing much more could *possibly* happen in half a minute.

And nothing possible happens. Something *impossible* happens instead.

You hear a skittering noise, behind you, to the left. It is too far away for you to discern what made the sound, so you ignore it. It was probably a mouse. Something large and heavy drops behind you. You shrug it off—the mouse must have fallen off a shelf.

For a moment, you forget that mice are very small.

There is no more skittering. Instead, there is a deep, throaty growl. You hear gnashing teeth. You hear your carpet being torn up by mighty claws. You no longer hear your heart beating. You decide it isn't a mouse.

It has been forty seconds.

You feel wet, hot air on your neck. Something is breathing on you. A strange creature's saliva flecks onto your skin with every exhale. Its breath smells like rotting meat and decaying flesh. It growls. You are no longer breathing.

You cannot move, or the minute will reset. If you move, you will have to keep sitting. You will have to start over. The creature will surely kill you. If you move. The minute. Will. Reset. If you move. You. Will. Die.

It has been forty-five seconds.

You can't see the creature, but you know that it's big. It blocks the light behind you, casting a massive, dark, endless shadow. It is darker than a shadow should be. Darker than the night sky. Darker than the blackness behind your eyes.

You pray to God. You pray to *any* God.

It has been forty-nine seconds.

You hear the slick sound of a tongue being swiped along a jaw. You hear the sound of teeth. You hear the sound of hunger. You do not know what hunger sounds like, but there is an unmistakable sound thrumming from deep within the beast not inches from devouring you. It is *hungry for you*.

It has been fifty-four seconds.

The minute is so close. You can feel it in your bones, in your frozen heart, in your joints aching from paralysis. Your minute is almost over. You know it. You might cry.

Suddenly, a growl. A deep and guttural sound. It deepens and lengthens, becoming a roar. It splits your eardrums and shakes your bones, you feel it travel through the floor and up your spine and you do not move, you *cannot* move, *don't move don't move don't move*—

It has been one minute.