Jogger Pushing Stroller (Father Time)

A man is jogging, pushing a stroller. He is wearing iPhone headphones, or knock-off iPhone headphones, and serious running attire, including sports sunglasses. In the stroller is his young boy, maybe two years old.

They pass from the middle left of the canvas to the bottom right. They're on a bike path. Behind them is grass and then a river. On the other side of the river is an expressway raised over an old railroad yard. Skyscrapers line the horizon further out, in unremarkable detail — here simply to establish an urban setting, if nothing more than that.

Rather, it's the look on the boy's face that attracts our attention, our gaze. Look: the look on his face! Eyes wide and supremely alert, the lad exudes alertness, but he does not look afraid. Alert, but unafraid. The viewer smiles, cute kid, funny expression, and wonders. What does he think about being pushed in a stroller this way, at this high speed? How does he feel? He looks like he's performing a task his life depends on, as if widening his eyes, increasing alertness, just a bit more, could make up the difference between living and dying. Because surely the kid, on some level, believes this. It's the instinctual God complex. If you pray for sun, and the rain stops, then it was God who stopped the rain; if the boy widens his eyes, and he lives, then he doesn't dare blink, no way. He's his own puppeteer. The fact that his life is actually in the hands of his father? Too complex a thought to cross his mind.

Is this good parenting? We ask this instinctually. And our instinct answers: yes. Yes, of course, why not? Being present in a child's life, father time, is important. Is good. We smile. This is good parenting. This man is a good father. Fathers having fun with their kids is a nice thing to see. The

kid's got to go outside, it's good for the kid, and the father's got to run, it's good for the father, so what's the harm? And the kid's two years old. *Two*! He's not doing much talking these days anyway, so why not let the young father, who works his tail off all day, and who hasn't taken a night off from parenting in just about forever, listen to Pearl Jam or the Planet Money podcast while his kid takes in silently the great outdoors, why the hell shouldn't he? Good for him.

But the gaze of that child. Something disconcerting. This might be, after all, good, a beautiful scene, involuntarily causes us to smile, but at the same time, the viewer wonders, is this how father time always is? Perhaps the first time, the first stroller-jog, the boy really was afraid. Kicking and screaming. Now he's gotten used to it, the speed — the kicking and screaming have passed, the tears have dried — however, physical remnants of the boy's original disconcertion still remain. The wide eyes; this heightened awareness. A defense mechanism. "Slow down," the brain reacts. "You're two years old." It's the same alarm the brain has always rung, ever since this father time began months ago. "Slow down. You're two years old." The same warning. Through the kicking and screaming and crying, the same alarm every time. But now the boy has realized something, a real mind-fuck: the brain had been wrong. He was not going too fast, *is* not going too fast. He can handle the speed, after all. The brain had acted, in a panic, wrong, as if it had never considered a stroller being pushed by a jogger before. As if it had just assumed that the boy speeding through the wind could only be falling from the lethal height of six feet. But the brain was wrong, the boy is learning. It is okay to go this fast, no matter what the brain says, no matter what the body tells him. It's okay. His brain was wrong, *is* wrong, and Daddy is right. Yes, Daddy will keep him safe. Daddy will keep him safe, no matter what. Daddy is right; I'll be all right.

Just don't go any faster, Daddy.