

The Pet Store

Okay. Go ahead. Stare. We'll see who blinks first. I've got three sets of eyelids and I've stared down dinosaurs. Of course I'm not talking about me *personally*. My genetic memory is so vast that I take nothing personally. My past lives surpass all human comprehension. I first appeared 215 million years ago, during what you call the Triassic period. I've watched continents be born, and oceans dry. I've seen mountains rise and fall. Climate change? I remember life without ice caps. I'm a survivor. I outlasted the dinosaurs and the mastodon. I've already lived through two mass extinctions. I will outlast you.

I watched you stand up. Lose your fur and grow thumbs. Run and hide and shiver. Start playing with fire. Learn to hunt. Stab and kill. Grab and defend. Catch and stockpile. Invent. Solve. Pursue. You are a devious, unprincipled lot – admittedly cooperative enough when the need arises.

Me, on the other hand, I never run. I don't have to. And I definitely don't need a leash. I am free. But you, kid, are bound more and more every day by your impulses and desires. You and your kind are a planetary train wreck. A volcano of consumerist desires blotting out the sun. A meteor shower of one-use cartons and fiesta-toned plastics.

Slow is not my weakness. It is my strength. What you think of as "slow" is something you'll never understand.

I am patient.

While you – you are weak, defenseless, complicated, self-sabotaging and most of all – hurried. You are so anxious to grow. And you will. You will grow and have your first armpit hair, have your first skinned knee, lose your baby teeth, have your first wet dream, and sleepwalk your way through school. Break your leg on ski trip. Shatter your heart in love. Fracture your consciousness with stress. Hyperextend your soul in a search for meaning. Sprain your ego as a

junior executive. Have kids and have your heart broken all over again. Replace your hips and knees. Make peace with incontinence. Surrender to fate. You are so fragile. Through it all, I will still be the same. I'm a perfected design. Evolved. Resilient. Sturdy and self-contained. You are so vulnerable in so many ways kid. Vulnerable and needy. Put your sticky hands back in your pockets. I don't need petting.

But like I said, nothing personal. I'm just saying, if you want to get a puppy, that's fine. Puppies are cute. Your puppy will be cute but then he will turn into a dog, just as you are cute but will turn into an adult. Me? I will always be a tortoise. I will just be a bigger, older tortoise.

Seriously, kid. Move on. It's okay. Get a puppy.