



The Disruption of Stillness

In the grand scheme of things, Nicolas never really realized how insignificant he was. The day before was one that he will always remember – a short span of time that seemed like the end of the world. He worked his nine to five, drank coffee with his co-workers at the water cooler, listened to his favorite 90's radio channel on the way home in his 2003 Nissan Altima, and sat down on his most luxurious item – his couch, as his mind absorbed the newest episode of NCIS.

For the twenty two year old Nicolas who had recently graduated from the University of Michigan, every day was the same day. He wasn't *sad*, it's just that he wasn't happy – everything seemed still. Most people live their lives like Nicolas, some don't realize, some are simply content with what they have. A problem arises, however, when those who do not realize, are the same ones who are not content with what they have. Nick, was one of those problems.

Yesterday was *almost* the same day as those that preceded it. Nick was just about ready to sleep, apathetic towards the next day, when he suddenly decided to pick up the book his ex-girlfriend left at his house. The name? *The Fifty Most Influential People in the World*. Nick picked it up, hoping the boring title would foreshadow a boring book so that he would fall asleep, but after reading the first few pages about the Russian Head of State, Vladimir Putin, Nick was intrigued. He read the entire book, questioning the entire time why he couldn't be like one of those leaders, why he was so irrelevant to the world, and finally, he cracked. Nick was not apathetic, he was crushed; he had finally realized that to this point in his life, he had done nothing that anyone would ever remember.

He woke up the next morning, still feeling worthless, and called in sick to work. He *wanted* to be significant, he just didn't know *how*. So he grabbed a light windbreaker, put on his gold ring that his late father had gifted him, and slipped into his favorite pair of blue New

Balance shoes, and walked out of the door towards the park across the street. The busy New York Traffic and the obnoxious sounds of even more obnoxious drivers filled his ears, and he let out sigh, “at least I get to live here, where everyone’s lives are just as miserable.”

The East Asian inspired park across the street from Chinatown was one of Nick’s favorite places in the City. It was as though the second you walked through the little fence, you were no longer in New York. The noise just disappeared, the smell of the air changed from hot-dogs to fragrant flowers, even the people, who would have pushed you to the side just seconds before, were at peace.

Nick walked towards the tree section of the park, where a concrete walkway was broken up by a symmetrical layout of trees, almost resembling the blocks of New York. The calmness was refreshing, but Nick was still thinking about the book from the night before. As he questioned what he had done, or rather what he planned to do, he saw a mysterious elderly man on the park bench, surrounded by birds. The man was not feeding the pigeons; instead, his hands were just in the position as though he was going to. They looked at him and he looked back, it was as though they were communicating, as though they were friends.

As Nick slowly turned around so as to not interrupt the man and his birds, the man uttered a few words: “I have sat on this bench every day for the past few years, yet never has anyone sat down next to me. Boy, something troubles you. Sit.”

Nick, who was already stressed, decided to sit, realizing he had nothing to lose.

The two men sat in a silence for a while: both of them taking in their environment. Flowers grew behind them while miniature trees with bright fall leaves stared at them. Every so often, the warm, early autumn heat was interrupted by a chilly breeze – the trees shivering and

the birds shaking. In the silence of the park, the small remnants of police sirens and construction drills could be heard, almost serving as reminders that peace, especially in New York, was a lost concept.

The elderly man, who did not turn, finally spoke, “Here, boy, I want to show you something, let’s go for a walk. This bench gets boring after a while.”

“Uh, okay,” said Nick, who was in no mood to begin walking – he had finally relaxed in the stillness of the park.

The two men began walking, almost appearing to be father and son. From behind them, one could see a windbreaker and jeans contrasted with a full gray suit – as though generations were colliding. They walked in harmony, their feet touching the ground at the same time, their arms swinging through the air simultaneously – there was a mystical aura too it, almost like the connection was a product of fate.

The man picked off a small purple flower and twirled it in his hands, “When I was a boy, I would walk around this park all day long, studying the trees, the birds, the people. Everything has one aspect in common – stillness.”

Nick could still not see the purpose of this walk. Why was he even listening to the crazy old man? Regardless, he decided to appease him. “Why? What did you have to gain?”

“I had everything to gain, boy. Plato once said that ‘I am the wisest man alive, because I know I know nothing,’ he wasn’t wise because he didn’t know, he was wise because he kept searching.”

Impatiently, Nick sighed, “searching for what?”

The man smiled; “That is a good question.”

They paused for a moment, and the man looked at Nick. Nick’s cold blue eyes were the exact opposite of the man’s warm, brown ones. The man’s face had few wrinkles, but it was apparent to Nick that he had lived a long life, and had experienced far more than Nick could ever imagine he himself would.

“There is something about being still that makes people happy. Maybe happy is not the right word, maybe the word is content. Nevertheless, I always saw people being still – and only now am I beginning to understand it. The trees remain still because they have no need to move, everything is given to them. The birds remain still when no danger provokes them - they too have no need to move. The people? The people remain still because it is easy, because there is no risk in staying still. The thing is, boy, you get bored of staying still. Sure, it’s easy, but easy does not mean happy – easy means monotony, it means becoming content. Humans, unlike trees, don’t need to be content, we need to be happy. We need to fall down hills and climb up mountains; we need to do what we love and refuse to let anything get in the way of that. Because if I have learned one thing in the years I spent *practicing* stillness, it’s that stillness is a waste of time.”

Nick stared at the man, trying to comprehend what he had just heard.

“Stillness...”

The two of them kept walking in silence, both of them evaluating the different aspects of their life. They approached a gorgeous arch, decorated in purple lilies and with a grass outline. It was the center of the park and an award winning design – Nick had never thought to visit it before. The man looked at Nick once again, and spoke.

“Ten years ago, I designed this arch after living most of life doing nothing. I did well in school, had a great job and a loving wife, but it was all never enough, and the moment I realized that I wasn’t doing anything: that I wasn’t impacting the world, I wasn’t making people happier, I wasn’t making *myself* happier, I dropped everything and followed my passion. Years and years of work and dedication resulted in this arch, and all I can say is, boy, if you are not happy with your situation, leave it.”

With that, the man walked away, as Nick turned around, hoping to get the man’s name or to speak to him again.

“Sir!”

He turned around for a brief second, a smile on his face, and waved goodbye. From the far away distance, Nick was able to spot a small gold ring on the man’s left pointer finger, the same exact location as his own.

Nick looked up once again, his ears being filled with a loud, obnoxious beeping sound. As he rose, he shuffled his hands around only to realize that they were caught in his tangled blanket, and the loud beeping sound came from the *sonic* alarm clock on his dresser. Beside him lay a half finished bottle of scotch: one that he did not remember drinking, as well as his now damaged copy of *The Fifty Most Influential People in the World*. He looked at the book and then at his navy suit, navy tie, and I-Banking portfolio resting on the couch beside him.

After meeting the man in his dream, Nick had finally realized that to this point, he had remained still. Sure, he performed well in high school, graduated from an amazing university, and was given a well-paying job on Wall Street, but he had done nothing outside of his comfort zone. The night before, he blamed himself for not being significant; after the dream, he finally

realized that it was his choice to change. Nick looked himself in the mirror and smiled, possibly for the first time in months. He brewed his dark-roast cup of coffee, called in sick, again, to his Wall Street investment banking firm, and looked under his bed for a specific box.

After going through a dozen different containers, Nick finally found the one he was looking for, and he blew the dust off of it before opening the lid. His eyes glittered with excitement as he peeked into the box. The reporter's pad felt like home in his hands and the copies of old U-Mich newspapers excited his mind – journalism was his passion, it always would be.

He grabbed the book from his bed and flipped to the last, empty page. Using his blue reporter's pen, he scribbled in:

“Nicolas Chan, Journalist.”