

The park symphony

Nicola Brittain

THE OLD MAN sat on the bench and watched the people walk by. If one were to ask him how he got there he would not be able to answer, for it was a mystery to him also. His mind had been daydreaming as he stepped out of his front gate and began his journey into the town. He was even oblivious to Mrs Montebelley's wave as she jogged along with the yapping little terror that was her dog. What the daydreams consisted of is also not too certain, because as he sat down on the chair and realised where his legs had brought him, the old man forgot the places his mind had wandered off to, choosing instead to refocus on where he was now.

So there he sat, with no particular aim or particular meaning. He would later conclude that his body was in want of sunshine and fresh air and therefore had led him to the park by the river he had not visited in years. But the actual motive lingered in the back of his mind as he rested his hands in his lap and relaxed as much as one could on a wooden park bench. It floated in the background, an annoying itch that he refused to scratch, as it would require facing a moment which he did not want to deal with.

Though withering with age and not seeing things as clearly any more, the old man continued to hear as if he was still twenty and living life to the fullest. Sometimes he wished he was deaf. The playground tree bark, which the old man had always speculated was never any softer nor safer than just

landing on the grass, crunched as the children ran around happily squealing as they played 'Stuck-In-The-Mud' along the monkey bars and underneath the slide. The chattering of tired and over-worked mothers filled the voids between screams, and the sounds of the trees and the water as they collided with the wind blended it all together in a way that caused the old man to smile. He decided that he liked this particular symphony that life had created. The Park Symphony was quite beautiful and happy compared to the others he had heard over the years: the hospital symphony which consisted of beeps and coughing, or the empty house one, which only resonated the sounds of creaking wood and wind chimes.

As he sat waiting, listening and observing, the more forward his subconscious thoughts and reasoning became. They could almost be grasped by his current thoughts, even if the man himself wasn't sure if he wanted the topics to be thought about or not. One could say it was like when you take cough medicine; you know the burning sensation is going to happen and you can't decide whether the end result will be worth the pain. However, undesirably, the old man's mind decided to take the medicine and grasp the ulterior motive that brought him to that park bench, and tug it into the forefront of his mind. Without his consent, his eyes closed and the floodgates opened into a moment from a different time.

The Park Symphony faded from his ears and turned into a dull echo in the background. The old man nearly laughed at the idea that he was finally going to call up something he had avoided for so long. He knew he could open his eyes, return to reality and go a little longer without reminiscing, but he thought it was best that he finally face the haunting moment that had changed his life. One can only hide from defining moments in their past for so long.

It came, at first, in the form of a white scarf twisting in the breeze against a backdrop of an empty mind; but soon the void

filled and became something familiar to the old man. A hand grew from the scarf and morphed into the form of a young woman dressed all in white, while the scene around her dripped and shifted into the park by the river. Although it was the same place he was in now, it was situated in a time that made it seem like an entirely different place.

The air seemed lighter and cleaner, the sun less hot and harmful; more energy ran through his veins but less knowledge was in his head. There were no sounds of tree bark crunching, not only because the park was bare that day but also because there was no playground at all. There wouldn't be for at least another decade. The younger version of him was more comfortable lounging on the ground rather than leaning on a tree, as the park bench was also yet to make its mark on the landscape.

He remembered seeing her for the first time: she was so young, beautiful and alive. She seemed to glow as she walked down along the river's edge, completely oblivious to the world and all it contained. Wisps of her hair flicked up in the breeze and her shoes made little taps when they came into contact with the footpath she strolled along. These little things caught the eye of a young man left in her wake, a young man who would care for her for the rest of her days.

It was only a fleeting moment, a small snapshot in time, but it held more meaning than an outsider could perceive. The simplest things usually do when it comes to matters of the heart.

As it played back in the old man's mind, it became less and less painful to watch. His heart felt lighter after each viewing, more grief stripping away. A smile found its way onto the old man's lips. He felt peaceful, calmed and happier than he had been in quite a while. The Park Symphony grew louder as he opened his eyes and returned to the present. With the heat of the day beginning to press on his skin, the old man slowly

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stood up. With one last glance at the river and the bench, he started back down the path he assumed he had come from.



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