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A Night of Memories

Peck Park, a park with a name that could not be any more generic. However to me, it was more than a playground in Queens that was four blocks away from my house. It was a place of memories, but much has changed about my neighborhood in terms of people. Holden Caulfield of The Catcher in the Rye mentions that he has never found out where do the ducks in Central Park go in the winter. I myself, did not know what went on, or rather around the park after it closes and before it opens.

I began my journey out to Peck Park to investigate what goes at an unholy hour, with my tired and cranky mother of course. We walked around the park under the faint glow of the street lights. The vast quantity of snow that had not been shoveled reflected just enough light to reveal the silhouettes of the three sections of the playground, the basketball courts, the tennis court, the handball court, and the massive baseball field. We walked for a couple of minutes when I notice the accursed cat that keeps me awake at night hangs around the park. Normally, I would be fine with the occasional meow, but the sound this cat makes sounds more like a human groaning help than an actual cat. I found the absence of raccoons and stray dogs to be comforting as they tend to put up a fight more than any other animal that lives in the suburbs. Nothing much went on after 10:00 P.M for the next couple of hours. There were a few people who decided to walk their dogs.

While waiting for an event worth recording to occur, I decided to start a conversation with my mom about whether or not anything interesting ever happened here. Long conversations with my mom were rare because I usually barely have any time to talk with her since I wake up at 5:55 A.M. and get back home at 7:30 P.M. only to rush to do my homework and studies until one or two hours past midnight. In fact, this mid-winter break is working out to my advantage as I am recovering the many lost hours of sleep. Staying up from the park's closing time at nine P.M. to its opening time at eight A.M seemed like no big deal for me.

My mom on the other hand, could not handle the mental strain of staying awake at this hour. It seemed like striking a conversation would help us both. My mom told a story she heard from my friend's aunt.

"Her family was driving past the park when the child in the car stated that there was a kid playing in the playground at approximately midnight. The parents looked into the park and saw nothing. The child's unrelenting remarks that there was a child in the park spooked the parents enough to drive away," my mom said.  
 "I can't believe people still believe in ghosts and spirits," I responded.  
 "Oh, I also remember how the early mornings went around here!" she exclaimed.

My mom mentioned the early morning routine of some people at the park. During the mornings with no snow or ice on the ground, there were people who got up willingly at 6 A.M to go jogging. My mom also used to be one of those people. She described how there was this man in the van who supposedly watched the people in the park and called the police when any crime or violation occurred, even a minor one such as music being played too loud. Apparently this person had also won some sort of lottery that enabled him to find the time to do this. There were also many stereotypical Oriental Asians doing Tai Chi in the park. My mom described them as elderly with gray hair or a bald skull, a wrinkly face, and thin limbs who liked to play calming music. Why anyone would get up this early, or rather how anyone has the willpower and self-discipline to do that is beyond me.

Just as my mom finished her recollection of the park, someone walked by, scrounging for cans to recycle. When my mom finished her recollections, we continued to walk around the park in dead silence. I found walking around the park during the winter to be much different. Most of my time at the park was spent during the summer. The waves of cricket chirps or the songs of the birds were a constant companion. Here, my mom and the howling wind were my companion.

In an effort to keep my mother from complaining about the cold and her fatigue, I resorted to digging up old childhood memories. I decided to tell my mom about an old childhood friend I saw on the subway on Friday.

"Hey, do you remember Benjamin?" I asked. A memory of him I almost forgot was brought upon by my desperation to alleviate or at least distract my mom from her crankiness.

"Yes, what about him?" my mom responded.

"Remember how he hit his on the slide when I was around five or six? It seemed like an average day at the park, nothing weird going. However, when my friend got up from the slide, he bumped his head on one of the welded sections of the slide. The slide was comprised of curved pieces with the ends of each piece jutting out. This made welding the parts easier, but I was surprised that it even got past safety regulations or even common sense. By the time I had gotten to the end of the slides to see why there was a crowd forming, the ambulance had rushed over and whisked him away," I said while looking at the very slide that caused the split. Well, the ancestor of that slide.

My mom had unleashed a big yawn after hearing my story. However, I still had more to say. I began to talk about how at some point in my childhood, the playground caught fire. Whether it was from the dry summer heat, fireworks, or a cigarette, you could smell the smoke from a couple of blocks away. While it did put itself out, the entire middle playground was burnt. It reeked of burnt rubber, the paint on the metal bars had burnt off, and several wooden planks had disappeared into a pile of ash. The entire middle portion of the playground had been sectioned off for reconstruction. While these were vivid memories of my childhood, it was like my mother heard it for the first time, and the first time I caught myself speaking of these memories.

When sunrise came, it dawned upon me that my mom was probably too tired to even bother remembering what happened and she was only concerned with the present. The area under her eyes grew to be dark crescent moons. By the time I got home, the answer to my question about what happens around the park after it closes and before it opens is this dull answer: Nothing much.