

(We are listening to hip-hop, loud. The music pounds us and then transforms into the sounds of cars honking, city streets, voices and dogs barking. It is late Sunday morning in Stuyvesant Square, New York City, and ALAN HARRIS is in front of us. He wears a loose fitting sport coat over khakis and a button-down shirt. The sounds fade away as he addresses us.)

ALAN

I'm going to begin with Felicia.

I'm sorry. I shouldn't—I'm sorry. I'm so used to—Up in front, figure of authority. I just...I would like. I would like to begin with...I mean, it seems the best place to— I mean, if there's—if the—if—if...OK. Thank you.

Felicia. She's this young black woman in my—Oh! Sorry! African-American. She's an African-American and she is excellent. The best student I have. Not that you'd ever imagine! I mean, eighteen years old, hair in braids, popping gum, earrings the size of small planets. Oh, and she's feisty! Ho-ho, keeps you on your toes, let me tell you. Felicia's in my office three, four times a week after class. Arguing, punching holes in my lectures. God forbid I try and bring up a story!

The other day I came into class with—Well, this is just something I heard, once, here in the park. Something I hoped they would find resonant.

A New Yorker and an American Indian are...Uh. I say he's American because, you know, some people hear "Indian" and they assume he's a...

(He points to his forehead.)

Oh! Sorry! Native American! Of course! Native American. Sorry, I didn't— Or a woman! Could be a woman! No reason to...OK.

This New Yorker and this...*chief* are walking down Fifth Avenue. Rush hour. All of a sudden the chief stops. He stands still for a moment, listens, and then makes a beeline over to this newsstand. Behind a stack of papers is this potted plant and on one of its leaves is a cricket. This little cricket, sitting there, quietly chirping away. Now the New Yorker is—This just blows his mind!

"How did you—how did you *hear* that?"

The chief just shakes his head.

"Watch."

The chief takes a quarter out of his pocket and tosses it in the air. Cars honking, millions of bodies rushing by, coin hits the sidewalk and POW! Everyone looks down at their feet. The chief turns to the New Yorker and says:

"It all depends on what you're listening for."

(Pause.)

I didn't say it was going to be funny.

Well, of course, Felicia jumps up from the back of the class, sticks her gum under the desk and launches in.

“What’s your point, Dr. Harris? What are you saying about race? What are you saying about America? What are you...”

Hey! Just trying to tell a story! Just something I wanted to share, that I find meaningful. Something I think about when I sit here looking at his statue. How it’s important we don’t miss. What we can’t see, what we’re not aware of: these things affect us. These things can change our lives.

Stuyvesant! The statue, it’s Peter Stuyvesant. He was the last director general of New Amsterdam before it fell to the British and became New York. I’ve been studying, doing a lot of—Since we moved here.

(He gestures around him.)

I mean, this is Stuyvesant Square, we’re living in Stuyvesant Town, down there is Stuyvesant Street. It was a question of *who is this*? It’s my passion, really. Historical Anthropology. People, cultures: why we act, why we do certain things to each other. Helps create a frame of reference. Makes things easier for me.

(He points at the statue.)

Fascinating, fascinating man. Born sixteen ten, eleven (nothing certain). Very Dutch. Very Calvinist. Very God-Is-Watching-If-You-Masturbate-You-Die. Spent his whole life serving God and the West India Company, the founders of New Amsterdam. Even lost his right leg in the process. You can see it, there on the statue.

While he was governor of Curacao, Stuyvesant led a ship full of three hundred Dutch soldiers to try and take back a nearby island from the Spanish. In the first assault a cannon ball smashed into his right knee. Totally destroyed it. His leg had to be amputated. The bone was sawed through. The bleeding was stopped by searing the flesh with hot irons and boiling water. There was no anesthetic. They just strapped him down, put a stick in his mouth, and carved away.

Now, Sarah, my wife, she’s probably heard this story a million times over the last year. And whenever I bring it up, faculty party or whatever:

“That is soooo interesting, Alan. History. HIS-story. Little fables that always happen to be written by those who happen to have a big slab of fat swinging between their legs.”

Oh, she’s a pistol.

I mean, she’s joking (sort of), it’s all, you know, ha-ha, but what she means—The message *underneath* is...why? Lewis and Clark are one thing, but this man was strange. This man was disturbing. Why are you obsessing? Why are you enthralled by this dead Dutch gimp?

It’s...it’s just that he survived. Because of his faith, they say. Faith in what he knew was right in the world.

Right now, for me, that has become an extraordinary thing.

(We hear a crash and a voice yelling from offstage.)

MARA LYNN

ADDISON JAMES, YOU GET BACK IN BED, YOU TURN OFF YOUR LIGHT, OR I'M GONNA WHOOP YOU LIKE A RED-HEADED STEP CHILD!

(We hear the voice calling after someone again.)

All right....That's a good boy...That's right...Mama loves you.

(MARA LYNN DODDSON enters her kitchen in Fayetteville, NC.)

I swear that boy is dumb as a turd.

(She wears a slightly faded dress. It is before dawn on Sunday and she has been up all night. Her hair is pulled back out of her eyes, which are worn and lined from lack of sleep.)

I mean, flesh of my flesh, but he does not *listen*. Dr. Singh says we spoiled him. Says all the boy needs is more discipline. Dr. Singh's full of advice. Dr. Jagdeep Singh. He's an Indian. Not one of ours, but from over there. You know:

(She points to her forehead.)

Where they wear those little red doohickies. Earl says they look like they're renting their heads out for target practice. Earl's not especially bright.

First time I went to the hospital, all the way to Chapel Hill, I was very impressed. Everything was so big and white and sort of...hummed. This pulsing, shiny feel coming off everything. Sort of like:

"This is important. This will cost you money."

I was with Addison James in the waiting room and he was running around like a banshee. I figured, let one of these people deal with him. I mean, that's their job, right? I'm looking through the magazines. Huge stack of them piled up for our viewing pleasure. Only, see, he's got all kinds of different ones. Magazines from New York City; Paris, France. High fashion and high living. And this—this is another world. Like a strange and foreign thing. Women with shaved heads and tattoos. Women with their titties pierced. I am talking one hundred percent honest-to-God pierced. What is *that* about? I mean, I know the world is changing. But how did that become acceptable?

(The sound of a car driving by. She stops and listens, as it continues on.)

Dr. Singh sits across from me in that room where Addison James gets all hooked up. He's there with his legs crossed, all businesslike, tapping a shiny black pen on some chart. And it's just—If I'm bone-honest, he makes me tense. He talks all funny. This high-pitched voice and that accent; sorta singsongy, like a cartoon.

(Imitating Dr. Singh's voice.)

"Good morning, Mrs. Doddson."

I mean, that is funky. And he's always talking down at me.

"You are late again, Mrs. Doddson! Why are you keeping me waiting, Mrs. Doddson!"