

That Waits for You to Mend or Understand

Atenea Duenas toils away at their college homework. Though the house is by no means empty, the night seems to tuck away those getting well rested and hush those who aren't. The light shining above commands the machine to keep moving, as if they are the exception to the night's rule. Duenas almost buckles under the pressure, but decides to keep moving. They can't stop, the demand to keep moving is too great. Complete isolation, some kind of loneliness.

Margarita Duenas sits out on the porch again. Watching the world move around her; it's constant moving, yet she stays. The music swirls, spinning, almost evolving as she is. Her calcite ball absorbs the stress that her 9-to-5 demands that she carries—it's calm. The sun beams onto her skin, trying to retrieve her wants and desires. In its wake it leaves answers to the lying questions about how to move forward. Complete isolation, a deserving tranquility.

Zeytin Ercan takes a step back from neverending chatter. They're inclined to go back in, they want to. But for a brief moment, they can hear, they can think, they can do whatever they want by themselves. They light up the TV, and ironically enough, it soothes them. No back and forth, no dance of tongues throwing around stories needing some kind of thought or feedback. Just listening. Complete isolation, a brief escape.

Complete isolation, the death of noise, silence. Both a rarity and a threat to the hussle and bussle of the modern community, it seems rather unimportant and even unwanted. However, there has to be some benefit—the core of tranquility is the calm of silence, so this willing isolation provides something else. But what's the drive? What curse does this dark magic hold to drive people to loneliness? Why would you willingly cut yourself off from the people who love you? To answer that, let's circle back to the main characters of our little set pieces: Zeytin Ercan, Atenea Duenas, and Margarita Duenas. Three people with varying introverted personalities. What profiles demonstrate is that the healing voice of solitude is being silenced by an era of noise.

Atenea Duenas, usually referred to as Duenas, sits at their desk in their childhood home. Due to a pandemic ushering in a new change to school regulations, they are able to test, cram, and suffer through college life all at the comfort of their own home. Though losing that classic college experience is a bummer for some, that wave of disappointment is lost on Duenas. “ I have social anxiety, so I don't really like, you know, having to go out every day. It was kind of, very, stressful for me”(A. Duenas). Found in roughly 1 in 3 people, social anxiety causes most people to flat out avoid interaction with new people (Philip and Ungar). A problem that makes solitude look all the sweeter in the eyes of Duenas. “ I think it helps me get less stressed and helps my brain, you know, finally relax from the pressures outside”(A. Duenas). And right they are, with research by Nguyen, Ryan, & Deci, they concluded that spending time to yourself has a “Deactivating effect” on the nervous system. Causing calm and peace, but they describe that it has a paradoxical effect (Nguyen, Ryan, & Deci). This low stimuli action has a negative effect as well, one that Duenas knows all too well. “ It's very comforting and something I can fall back upon and then, like, sometimes it's lonely” (A. Duenas).

It always circles back to loneliness, never more, never less. Well, not necessarily. Though separating yourself from the rest of the world is usually portrayed as a condition in the need of medicating, the reality is that this self-isolation can act as the medication itself. And nobody knows this better than Zeytin Ercan, and a few physiological experts.

“I love spending time with all of these people, but I just can't do that and enjoy it when I haven't recharged” (Ercan). “Recharging” is Zeytin's form of solitude. It's a simple 5 or so minutes to themselves where they partake in personal hobbies like drawing, watching TV, or even crocheting. Though this phenomenon has no medically approved name, it's heard around the block as “introvert hangover” or “introvert burnout”. In an experiment set up by Sointu Leikas and Ville-Juhani Ilmarinen, the results suggest that the average amount of time for an introvert's battery to eventually wear out is around three hours (Leikas and Ilmarinen). Well, what happens if we may

have accidentally pushed the limits of those three hours? Well, it can cause things like irritability, depression, difficulty sleeping, and, as Zeytin put it best, “If I keep doing this right now, I’m going to explode” (Ercan). Hyperbole aside, this rocks a fair part of Zeytin’s world, and for a while too.

Though she describes it as seemingly being a part of her whole life, she manages to pinpoint her realization around sixth or seventh grade. “I would always get really upset when I got home from school and I would always kind of go to just be alone” (Ercan). Having to schedule isolation in her rather busy schedule is a chore as well. Having to skip out on friend get-togethers, due to the fact that it might be too long or leaving the party a bit soon, has its downsides. But Zeytin views solitude as a bit of a bitter medicine: “I think it’s really important and it benefits me just because, like, I get to enjoy the things that I enjoy doing with other people. So I have to enjoy the things that I do with myself in order to enjoy life... is how it works” (Ercan).

Bitter Medicine is good for those who need it, but for those who don’t, it seems like a less than average way to spend your afternoon. Well, prepare to take 10 mL every 4 hours because allotting time to yourself is more than the social situation antidote that I’ve been prescribing it to be.

Let’s sit down with Margarita Duenas and take a look at what it does for her and how it helps her take a look inside herself.

Through a time of uncertainty and fear, the pandemic had Margarita Duenas scared of losing family, friends, constantly checking the news of various countries to make sure that everything was in check. “I was completely overwhelmed. Hearing, um, news from three different countries, Spain, U.S., and Mexico. It came to that point, where I, I, I, I just was really overwhelmed and then I started doing it” (M. Duenas). Sure, it started as a way to get rid of stress, but news came and went, times changed, priorities shifted and the pandemic became a part of daily life. But the habit stayed. Every 10 minutes to an hour and a half, she would be out there in the sun meditating. Sitting in the sun, various crystals in hand, having various frequencies align mind and soul. After a while, questions

came: "Sometimes, you know, thoughts come to my mind. And then I have an internal diálogo with, I don't know, whoever myself or the universe or whoever would want to call it, the way they ask questions and I get some answers" (M. Duenas). Whether a higher being is at play or not, the subject of the matter is the results. There are answers hidden in these quiet moments, something to uncover, but how? Another experiment by Netta Weinstein, Thuy-vy Nguyen, and Heather Hansen goes to show that not only does solitude provide a greater sense of peace, but it also gives a greater "sense of autonomy (self-connection and reliance; absence of pressure)". Especially in older folks, this experience leads to better self improvement (Weinstein and Nguyen). It ends up being a cold cut case of being blind to the answer that was right in front of you all along. "If you sit long enough and you ask yourself what I could be doing better or what should I be stopping doing in order to be happier, the answer will come to you when you're meditating" (m. Duenas).

The future for our interviewees looks bright, perhaps a little too bright. Duenas describes how the comfort of solitude is too much, how they hope to step outside and interact despite their anxiety. "So I guess the challenge is, you know, to experience different things instead of going back to the comforting thing" (A. Duenas). As for those who see solitude as more of a positive, sometimes it feels like it's hard for them to catch a break. The days are getting longer, with it harder for them to book a time which isn't filled with some kind of work. Apparent in the case of Zeytin Ercan, "It's going to be hard for me [Having time to themselves] to, you know, especially in college with have a job go to school consistently and like still maintain somewhat of a social, you know, life so I don't know" (Zeytin). Even then when everything is all set and done, there's no telling whether the light of the sun will creep into the moments of apparent silence as in Margarita Duenas' experience. "I can't shut down my brain quickly and sometimes meditate and I'm thinking about: It's 5:30, I really need to go inside and start cooking. What am I going to be cooking? Blabla, Blaba" (M. Duenas).

Solitude provides calm, combats stress and helps us live a more valuable, stress-free life. The matter of fact is that we just don't value it; we raise ourselves to dread it and pour all of our effort

into creating a community that creates no space or time for it. This fear of silence, of unproductiveness, of solitude seems to slander this fading past time. We miss out on experiences that really are other worldly. "Like I said, experience and the feeling of nothingness, experience and the feeling of love, sometimes, you know, thoughts come to my mind" (M. Duenas).