



# **NOTHING NEW IS THE BIGGEST ILLNESS OF ALL**

**ChatGPT & TIHOMIR RANKOV**

**Title: *The Stillness of April***

April had always been a quiet girl, not shy exactly, just... still. In her small town, the trees changed faster than people did. The same neighbors walked the same dogs down the same sidewalks. Even the birds seemed to recycle their songs.

April didn't complain. She got up, she worked, she watered her one houseplant, she went to bed. It was easier that way. No surprises, no heartbreaks, no risks. She told herself it was peace.

But something inside her was whispering. At first, it was barely a sound—like wind brushing past a closed window. But by the time her 29th birthday arrived, the whisper had grown louder.

"You're fading," it said.

April didn't understand. She was healthy, employed, safe. What could possibly be wrong?

Then she started to see it in others. Mr. Talbot at the bookstore, who hadn't changed his window display in three years. Her coworker Megan, who had been "getting ready to leave this job" since 2021. Even her reflection in the mirror looked paused—like a photo that never got updated.

April realized what was happening: nothing *new* ever happened.

And somehow, it had become a sickness. Not of the body, but of the soul. The illness of "nothing new" had crept in like

mold—quiet, slow, and devastating. It dulled every color, flattened every smile. It whispered lies like, “You’re fine,” and “Maybe next year.”

One rainy Tuesday, April didn’t go to work. She walked instead. Past the bookstore. Past the same parked car with the chipped bumper. She kept walking until the streets no longer looked familiar. Her heart beat faster—not with fear, but with something else.

Possibility.

She ducked into a new café she’d never noticed before. Ordered something she couldn’t pronounce. Sat next to a stranger and struck up a conversation. That night, she wrote about it. The next morning, she signed up for a drawing class. The next week, she dyed her hair—just a streak.

And slowly, the illness receded.

It wasn’t a cure, exactly. She still felt the pull of stillness, the gravity of comfort. But now she knew: stagnation was the heaviest disease of all. It masqueraded as safety but left her hollow. It was life on pause, disguised as routine.

So April kept moving. Not fast. Not recklessly. But forward.

And in doing so, she remembered what it felt like to be *alive*.

## **"The Stillness of John"**

John lived in a small town pressed between old hills and older habits. Every day began with the same ritual: instant coffee, stale toast, and the rusted creak of his front porch swing. The paint peeled from his house like time flaking off

skin, but he never fixed it. It was always easier to say, “Tomorrow.” But tomorrow never asked anything new of John.

For nearly two decades, John worked at the same post office, sorting letters with robotic efficiency. He wore the same kind of shirt, the same brand of shoes, and drove the same model of car—three times over. When his dog died, he didn't get another. When his friends moved or passed on, he didn't replace them either. He said he liked the quiet.

At first, no one noticed the way life started draining from his eyes. He was healthy—blood pressure steady, cholesterol fine. But something in him was rusting deeper than any doctor could measure. His days were repeats, not variations. The seasons spun, but John did not.

One afternoon, he bumped into Claire, an old friend from high school who'd just returned from years abroad.

“You haven't changed a bit,” she said, smiling.

John smiled back, but it felt brittle. “No reason to, I guess.”

Claire looked at him, then past him, to the dusty stillness of his front yard. “That's not always a good thing, you know.”

That night, John lay in bed, her words looping. He realized he couldn't remember the last time he'd done something for the first time. Not a new road driven, not a new book read, not a new person known. He hadn't laughed—really laughed—in years. He had grown allergic to surprise, wary of change. And the worst part? He hadn't even noticed.

It was then he understood: his life had become a museum of sameness. He had become the curator of nothing new.

The illness wasn't in his body—it was in his soul. **Nothing new** had infected him like a slow, silent virus. And it was the most dangerous kind. It didn't kill you loudly. It just stopped you from living.

The next morning, he poured out the instant coffee and walked downtown. He bought a sketchpad. Sat in the park. Drew a squirrel. Badly. He called Claire.

He didn't become a new man overnight. But he took one step. Then another.

And for the first time in years, something inside him shifted.

He sneezed.

Maybe he was allergic to nothing new after all.