

One Morning

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As I changed my gears, I took in where I was.

I was riding up the bike path towards Bullfrog Valley Pond. It was mid-morning, about 8:00, and the day was laced with a low fog due to the humidity.

I often ride my bike early in the morning, but I could tell that that day was different. No one else was on the bike path, not on a gloomy day like today.

Nobody but me.

I loved the sweet, wet air. As I rode across the road to the path against the pond, I inhaled deeply and stopped pedaling for a moment. I was gliding through the fog, like a bird in clouds. It was a beautiful day.

When I opened my eyes, I could hear the upbeat slap of shoes on the asphalt. I saw a figure in the shadows. The fog seemed to open up to reveal the ominous silhouette. Once in sight, the outline of a person became an older woman, most likely in her late 50s, with short cut hair. She was wearing a pink sweatsuit and carried a bottle of Aquafina.

“Good morning,” I managed to wheeze, breaking the summer silence. Just trying to be polite.

“Why, good morning to you, too!” She spoke with enthusiasm.

I let the moment slip out of my mind automatically as I got off the path for a short water break. The worst part was still to come. The path was uphill from there.

I took a sip of water when the woman appeared again, seemingly out of nowhere.

“How are you this morning?” she asked.

“Er – fine,” I was a bit confused. Why didn’t she just keep going?

She held out her hand. “My name’s Denise.”

“Pleased to meet you,” I shook her hand for a moment, a strange expression frozen on my face.

Curious, I asked, “What brings you out on the path so early in the day?”

She paused for a moment, a long one. The birds hidden in the fog sang over the silence.

Finally, she inhaled deeply and said, “My sister has terminal lung cancer,”

I fell away from the moment for a second. All I could say was “I’m - I’m sorry to hear that,”

“No, don’t be sorry; it isn’t your fault.

“I’ve been running the path from the far end near Lower Dauphin schools ever since I got the news. Every morning, I drive here from Middletown at seven to run. It takes my mind away...”

I didn’t speak, I listened. I could not understand why she spilled this story upon me. Was there something wrong? Why was she telling me this?

“At first,” she began again, “I was upset with her. I had always told her to quit smoking, and it caught up with her when she didn’t.

“Now she can hardly breathe, hardly move. She’s all but chained to that bed now. The doctor says that a month more would be a miracle.

“I’m afraid to visit her because I don’t think she’ll forgive me for - for what I said...”

The air was suddenly silent once more for a few seconds. She casually took a sip of water. My mouth hung open like a barn door.

“Now, I want to give her money...I need to do something. She can barely pay her medical bills.”

I wanted to say something, to comfort her, but the emotion stuck to my throat. I couldn’t speak.

“Listen,” she insisted, stooping down in front of me to eye level.

“Your family is more important than anyone else in this world. Never, *never*, regret their existence.

“They are always there to care for you, to comfort you, to *love* you. You need to do the same to them. Don’t let them slip away. Love them back with all your heart.

I blinked, and one drop of water fell from my eye onto my cheek, and then down onto my hand. I watched it then fall to the pavement with a subtle splash.

I looked up, and she was gone, out into the fog once again.

I then sat for what seemed like hours, thinking about what she had said. Will my family still be around in a couple years? Do they know that I love them?

After I came back to the real world, I got on my bike once again, and rode back down the path to go thank my grandparents.