

The sky swirled above her head, exceptionally dark low-hanging clouds had suddenly covered the sky, showing no sign of changing any time soon. This weather was a rather rapid and unexpected shift from the almost-perfect weather twenty minutes ago. Despite this concerning change, Mandi continued to drive without taking notice of the weather, humming along to the crackling and quickly fading radio station playing through the speakers of her car. She was unsure of where she was going but continued to drive without regard to where she might find herself at the end of her drive. Realizing she had been distracted, Mandi shook her head and put her focus back on the road, noticing that the road and its surroundings had begun to change. The wooded area on either side of the road became increasingly dense, allowing little to no light to strike the forest floor, with the only view of the sky being where the surprisingly well-kempt road crept deeper into the forest.

Driving for nearly sixty minutes, a road sign appeared, perfectly placed without any sign of wear whatsoever; “Watervale Town Limits Population 1”. As soon as this sign had disappeared out of view, Mandi emerged from the dense woods into a large circular clearing with one main intersection at the center of the clearing. Driving towards the intersection in the middle of the clearing, a medium-sized library was positioned awkwardly with two parking meters outside on the side of the road. In front of one of these meters, a small pickup truck was parked, leaving only one available parking spot. As Mandi approached the library, she felt as if she needed to stop and explore the library. Parking in the one remaining parking spot, Mandi turned off her car and gathered change to place into the parking meter. As she approached the parking meter she noticed that the clock on the meter was already counting down from one hour and six minutes. Confused, Mandi placed her change into her back pocket and ventured into the library.

Upon entering the library, Mandi was immediately greeted by the warm smell of books wafting through the building. As she ventured further into the library she discovered an older gentleman sitting in front of a large computer monitor clicking his mouse at

seemingly random intervals. As she approached the man, Mandi cleared her throat in an attempt to get the man's attention. This attempt was unfruitful, however, as the man continued to randomly click his mouse, intently staring at the computer monitor before him. As Mandi continued to approach the man she noticed an old and yellowed name tag on the man's chest; "Walter" it read. Clearing her throat again she called out the man's name, still to no avail. Only when she waved her hand directly in front of the monitor that he was looking at could she finally get his attention. The man looked up and reached to his ears to turn on a hearing aid.

"I apologize, young lady, I was so focused on this game of Solitaire that I didn't see you walk in. How may I help you?" Walter asked.

"I was just passing through, well..." Mandi paused, "...town, I guess, if you have a sign saying so?"

"Yes, this is the town of Watervale. Several years ago, a catastrophic flood came through our small town and completely destroyed everything except this one building." Walter began to explain, motioning around the library. Mandi took a seat as Walter continued his story. "Nearly everyone in the town had left except for myself. I picked up what remained of my life and began working here at this library. I've been working here for nearly twenty years now." Walter took a sip of his still-warm coffee, sitting on a small coaster nearby. "We don't normally get too many visitors around here. What brings you to our little town?" Walter asked curiously.

"I don't know really. I normally drive to clear my head, not going anywhere specific. I've never driven out this far before though." Mandi replied. "I'm glad I stopped here, it's incredibly peaceful."

Walter looked around calmly, admiring the books stacked on shelves for what seems like miles in every direction. "Have you ever tried meditating?" Walter asked.

Mandi looked at Walter before answering, "I haven't, I've always thought things like that didn't really work."

Walter chuckled softly while shaking his head. “You couldn’t be more wrong my dear. Meditation, in my opinion, is one of the best ways to clear one’s head. It’s something so simple, you could do it while you’re on these drives of yours.”

“Alright, I’ll give it a shot.” Mandi replied, shrugging her shoulders.

Walter explained to Mandi how to meditate, breathing deeply and sitting exceedingly still. As Mandi began to follow suit, her whole body began to relax before tensing up to the point where she was unable to remain seated.

Standing up abruptly, loudly pushing her chair back in the process, Mandi stood at attention, looking down at Walter.

“What is wrong my dear?” Walter asked, looking up at Mandi, his face furrowed with wrinkles of concern.

“I... I don’t know.” Mandi replied hesitantly. “Something just came over me and I couldn’t help myself.”

Walter raised his eyebrows at her as his face impossibly furrowed with even more wrinkles of concern. Walter stood up from his chair slowly to become eye-level with Mandi.

“Let’s try again. I’m sure you can do it.” Walter said calmly, sitting back down to begin meditating again.

“Okay.” Mandi said in agreement as she sat back down, relaxing her shoulders and breathing slowly. As she began to relax again, she heard Walter begin speaking.

“I want you to clear your mind, and think only about your breathing. Breathe with me, dear.” Breathing a little deeper, Mandi began to relax once again. Then, after a few minutes, Mandi heard a thunderous sound that startled her, forcing her to attention yet again.

“My dear. What is going on inside of that head of yours?” Walter asked, still sitting down, refusing to rise this time.

“I heard a loud noise. It startled me.” Mandi replied, her breathing slightly labored.

As she looked down at Walter, she suddenly felt the strong urge to leave. Unable to ignore this urge, Mandi thanked Walter for his time, returning to her car. Looking over at the parking meter that she had observed earlier, she noticed that she had spent over an hour with Walter, with only two minutes remaining.

With her remaining time, Mandi reluctantly decided to attempt meditation one last time. In this last fitful attempt to clear her mind, Mandi settled into her seat and closed her eyes. Focusing intently on her breathing, Mandi began to relax for a final time as a sinking feeling consumed her. Sinking deeper into her seat, Mandi wondered if she would be forced awake again, but quickly let that thought go as she continued to sink. Once she felt as if she could not sink into her seat any further, she heard the same thunderous sound, however, this time it was clearer and more attention-getting. She heard this sound one last time before opening her eyes to discover only blinding white light. As her eyes adjusted to the light she came to the conclusion that her mind was finally cleared and she was prepared to begin her day.