

Mrs. Solester wakes up at 7 am even though her appointment isn't until 1:30 pm. She awakes alone and pushes herself out of the lonely bed. Beside herself, there hasn't been another person in the bed for over fifteen years. Her loving husband had passed away unexpectedly, so they had no preparations. His body was cremated and thrown away. She could've kept the ashes, but he wouldn't have wanted her too.

The cold seeps into her bones as she removes the blankets. The heater is set at, what seems to her, a chilly seventy degrees. She would like to put it higher, and sometimes does splurge, but on her fixed income she can't afford to do so often. Speaking of income, that's what her appointment is for: Income Tax. She has been paying it for fifty years, and she still doesn't understand it. She doesn't need to know, because Priscilla knows. *Thank God Priscilla is there*, thinks Mrs. Solester. *I would be completely lost without her. I hate troubling Priscilla and taking up her precious time. Priscilla says I do no such thing, but I know I'm a burden, no matter what she says.*

Mrs. Solester slips her feet into the worn-out slippers that Douglas gave her a few months before he past away. He bought them for her after she complained that her old pair "just let the cold come in as if it were invited." The very next day Douglas came home with a beautiful new pair of slippers.

Douglas was a fine man and a wonderful husband. He had often done little things like buying her gifts for simple reasons or, at times, for no reason at all.

Douglas and Mrs. Solester had met in high school. He had written a love poem for her on Valentine's Day that won her heart, not only for the holiday, but also for life. In the poem, he asked her out on a date, which she couldn't help but accept. On that first date, they had a wonderful time and he asked her to go study; she agreed. On the second date, the night after the first, he asked her to marry him; she accepted. Straight from the graduation ceremony of Halberg's class of '31, he drove her to city hall, where they were married. As their tenth year anniversary approached, Mrs. Solester hinted that she wished she had had a "nicer" wedding. A month later, Douglas surprised her with the biggest and finest wedding celebration the city of Halberg had ever seen.

After pulling the slippers snug around her feet, Mrs. Solester painfully lifts herself out of bed. She slowly starts off towards the kitchen. With small steps that crack the arthritis-filled joints of her legs, she slowly trudges on. She pauses for a moment's rest in the hallway, leaning on the tall, slender table that holds various things collected over the years: pictures (of friends, family and both weddings), a crystal heart, a finely sculptured porcelain rose that stands alone, and encased in a simple glassed frame his original poem that had won her heart. She takes notice of all the fragile items on the table.

Small tears moisten her eyes as she recalls all the happy moments spent with those frozen in the pictures. Most of the people have moved on, either to a more beautiful place of dwelling or a more beautiful state of being. Whatever the reason, all are gone now.

She touches the porcelain rose, to afraid of picking it up and risking the chance of it falling from her shaky hands. She feels the smoothness of its

surface against her cracked, wrinkly skin. Douglas had brought it home after she had mentioned, "It's a pity that the lovely roses I grow must wilt and die." The next morning she awoke and discovered Douglas sitting next to her in the bed with the precious rose in his hands. It was wrapped up similarly to the way florists wrap single roses. He handed it to her, leaned over and slightly brushed her lips with a kiss. "This, my dear lady, is for you because it represents you: Pure beauty captured for eternity." She had thanked him for the gift, but he had responded as he always had. "No need to thank me for loving you. These gifts are but drops compared to the sea of happiness you bring me."

She lets her old finger slide from the flower in eternal bloom to the crystal heart slightly below. The reason he had bought this gift was a sad one. She had, amidst a stupid trip of conceited vanity, had an affair with another man. He was a very handsome and kind gentleman. He introduced himself to her at a restaurant, where she had stopped for lunch during a solo-shopping binge. He had complimented her "majestic beauty" and had stated that he "would not be able to live with himself" if he didn't strive for an opportunity to meet her again. She was overwhelmed, and after thinking the million thoughts one can think in a moment, she agreed. She kept the meetings from Douglas, lying to him when she went to meet "the other man." She fooled herself into believing that she could keep both men. Douglas discovered her secret affair. She now knows that deep down she had wanted him to find out, and so he had. She was hoping that it would somehow make him jealous and make him come to love her more. Instead of getting angry or telling her to end the affair, as she had wanted him to do, he bought her this gift. While handing it to her, he stated, "My heart is like this one. It can be broken and shattered into a million pieces if dropped." She didn't thank him for the gift, for she couldn't bear to hear his usual response. After that moment, she never saw "the other man" again.

Mrs. Solester trembles her finger from the breakable heart to the framed poem. She looks at the paper and mentally recites the poem. She doesn't have to read it, for she knows it by heart. She still hears the echo of Douglas' voice reciting his literary masterwork.

Mrs. Solester pauses for a few more seconds, reflecting on the joyous moments that were and shall never be again; special moments she will never physically relive, but are mentally relived every day. She then pushes off and achingly finishes her voyage to the kitchen.

She reaches the kitchen and removes a plastic glass from the counter. She slowly fills it with water, feeling the burden of the newly added weight on her weak arm. She proceeds to pour the water into her old time coffee percolator. She plugs it in and fills it with some coffee grinds. Not too long ago, she had been connived into buying one of those high-tech coffee makers, which would work on its own and have her coffee made by itself every morning. She brought it home, unpacked it, but for the life of her couldn't figure out all the buttons. She felt too embarrassed to ask for help, so she brought out her old coffee maker, and put the virgin new one in storage.

Mrs. Solester begins to gather all the things she'll need for breakfast. She gets the pint of milk (she never buys a bigger size because they're too heavy),

some butter, and a small bottle of jam. She unrolls the bread package (no, no twisters, they're too much of a hassle), lifts out one piece, and drops it into the toaster. She grabs a coffee cup from near the toaster and fills it. Since her arm shakes so bad a little spills onto the counter, and she grabs the rag to wipe it up. Mrs. Solester realized long ago that every time she'd pour coffee she was bound to drop some, so long ago she set aside this rag to help her clean up the daily mess.

The toast pops up and she lets the scorched bread cool down for a few moments as she pours some milk into her coffee. She eventually removes the toast and puts it on a napkin. She grabs a butter knife to help her spread the margarine and jam onto her toast. She hadn't always like jam with her toast but Douglas had, and so she too learned to like it.

She eats in silence, though she doesn't like the quiet. She and Douglas had always talked at breakfast. In the beginning, they would discuss the dreams they had had the night before. Towards the end, their conversations turned into a sort of story time; Douglas would talk about happy occasions in his poetic way. She knew she had partaken in the events, but Douglas' words made them seem so wonderfully different. Now, she just recalls the times she had with Douglas, and those times he spoke about.

After breakfast, she puts her dirty dishes in the sink, and gives them a quick rinse. She then proceeds to embark on the return trip to her room. This time she passes the table without pausing, for the coffee has woken her up and given her added energy. Mrs. Solester opens up her closet and looks at her collection of clothing. The entire closet space was for her clothes. Douglas had never once put a single item into this particular closet, the biggest one in the house. She had always bought the finest clothes, since they helped her feel and look more attractive. At times, Douglas' quality of apparel suffered due to Mrs. Solester's wardrobe taste. Douglas, however, didn't mind; he merely said, "I can do without, so you can have a little more." She had thanked him, and he had given his usual, sweet reply.

Mrs. Solester slowly removes her thick nightgown. She had never bought a thick one until after Douglas had died. He had always insisted that she buy thin nightgowns, elegant, but thin nonetheless. When he first told her that she asked why. "Because, my love, if you ever grow cold, come to me and allow my love and body to warm you." She never did grow cold. After Douglas' death, however, there were no arms to turn to, no body to help in the fight, and no love to warm her soul. So, Mrs. Solester was forced to by herself thicker bedclothes, which provided only superficial warmth; nothing compared to what Douglas had provided.

She reaches into her closet and pulls out the outfit that Douglas liked most. The same wardrobe of which he said, "Should I ever die, please place a photograph of you in that outfit in my coffin; therefore, should my soul be trapped there, I may look upon it and gain hope. For looking upon that photograph of you is my idea of heaven." She had dearly wanted to fulfill that wish, but unfortunately she couldn't. She had practically begged for more time and money for a proper funeral, but no one answered her pleas, not even God. On

occasion, Mrs. Solester still cries for her inability of giving Douglas one of the few things he had asked for.

After properly bathing and dressing herself, Mrs. Solester grabs her purse and the manila envelope from her dresser. The thinly filled envelope is a tribute to Mrs. Solester's lonely life. Few receipts mean small spending. Most is from paperwork for the house. Hardly any are from outside places. She tries to go out, and on occasion she has a little fun, but with no one to relate those few happy times to, it's almost as if they don't even happen. She might have been able to visit Douglas' grave and tell him, had he had a grave.

Mrs. Solester, after digging in her purse for a few minutes, finds her house key. She lifts the key with a shaking hand to the lock. She tries desperately to insert it into the lock, but the constant shaking of her hand doesn't allow her to. Frustrated, she throws the key down. Crying, she slowly leans down to pick it up. She can feel the hot tears burn as they exit her eyes. The tears flow down her old, cracked skin. She's glad, and not for the first time, that she doesn't wear any make-up. It would all be a mess right now, and she wouldn't have the time to redo it if she had to. She had worn make-up before she met Douglas; however, after Douglas had seen her without make-up, he said, "Make-up is made for those women who must cover their flaws or create false beauty. Since you're naturally beautiful, what is there for you to make-up?" She never wore make-up again.

Mrs. Solester tries again to put the key in, she fails. She tries one more time with strong determination. This time it slides in perfectly. A smile of joy and relief creeps over Mrs. Solester's face and the warmth from it seems to evaporate the wet streaks left by the fallen tears. She unlocks the door and it opens creaklessly. Douglas had taught her how to oil doors to stop the annoying creaking. Removing the key, she steps out and closes the door behind her. With the new powers gained by her happiness, she easily puts the key into the other side of the troublesome lock. She locks the door and drops the key into a small, empty pouch in her purse, so she can find it more easily when she returns.

After taking a few steps, Mrs. Solester finds herself out from under her shady overhang. The high noon sun beats down relentlessly. No clouds even attempt to block it. "Thank goodness the bus stop is only a couple of houses down," she tells herself.

Mrs. Solester had never really liked sunny days. To her, they were always a burden: Far too bright for the eyes and far too hot for the body. It doesn't matter what Mrs. Solester thinks though, because the days are usually hot, bright, and sunny in the city of Halberg, even though the nights are cold.

Today's sun beats down upon her, a heavenly antagonist that she can in no way fight. She silently curses at the unrelenting force of nature that's supposed to give life, not drain it. Mrs. Solester realizes that her complaining won't change a thing, so she stops and tries to think of the things she'll tell Priscilla.

Mrs. Solester reaches the bus stop to find it empty. The small, blue bench, scolding to the touch, stores heat to keep weary waiters from sitting on it. Some nature fanatic must have designed these bus stops. There was absolutely

no protection from the elements. Mrs. Solester stands in the thin shadow cast by a lone palm tree, standing proud in its solitude a few meters away.

She hears the thunder of the bus engine and feels the ground shake slightly under her. She looks up as the hydraulically-powered doors open. "Strange," she thinks, "a bus without squeaky brakes."

Mrs. Solester grabs hold of the assistance bar and pulls herself up on the first step. It takes her a few seconds to climb the few steps. The moment she gets off the top step, the bus driver pulls away from the curb. Mrs. Solester doesn't like it when bus drivers do this. *The sign says, 'For your safety, please stay behind the yellow line.'* Well, I wish they would wait until I get behind it, Mrs. Solester thinks to herself. She reaches into her purse, and pulls out the change pouch, and lifts out the appropriate coins. After depositing the correct amount for the elderly rate, she starts to move towards a seat.

A small blue sign above the passengers' head reads, "Please offer seats forward of this sign to the elderly and handicapped." Mrs. Solester looks at the seats, all of which are full of people who don't fit either two categories. One seat, however, has only a package on it. The owner of the package is a young man.

The young man is rather "different" (as Mrs. Solester puts it) with purple hair and black nail polish. He sees Mrs. Solester standing and, after hesitating for a few moments, moves his package out of the way, allowing her to sit down. Mrs. Solester, out of gratitude, gives him a smile, which he returns.

After carefully sliding down into the seat, Mrs. Solester says, "Why thank you, young man. You don't know how much I appreciate that." To this, the young man simply smiles again. "You have quite a lovely smile," Mrs. Solester continues, giving a smile of her own. The same smile that Douglas had called "perfect." Douglas had also stated, "Your smile could make the saddest man happy, while your frown could make the happiest man sad." She always tried to smile.

Mrs. Solester pauses. She enjoys talking to people on the bus, but realized something long ago: Not all people want to talk. And if you talk too much, people begin to think you're a little crazy. So, Mrs. Solester waits in silence for a few moments. She hopes that if she's patient someone will come to keep her company. No one does. Therefore, she turns again to the young man next to her.

Mrs. Solester takes a closer look at the young man. He's dressed in all black, with silver jewelry sparkling here and there. She notices that there is a wire coming out of each ear. *Like those secret service people.* The two wires become one that leads into the green bag, which is some sort of backpack. She glances up at his face. It is a rather passive one with a calm look on it. The young man feels her scrutiny and turns to look at her.

"Is everything okay?" he asks.

Mrs. Solester gazes directly into his eyes. Before she can get any feeling from them, he looks away.

"What are those wires for?" She asks, pointing at the ones near his neck.

The young man lets out a sigh of relief. He thought he had done something wrong. He thought she was going to comment on his appearance; However, he is wrong. She is only curious about his earphones. "They're earphone wires that let me listen to my DiscMan." He opens the bag and pulls out the electronic device.

Mrs. Solester looks at it with intrigue, as if it were some alien device that fell from the sky. Then, she smiles saying, "Oh yes! I've seen those on commercials."

"Yeah, they've been going on sale lately. That's why I bought this one," adds the young man. He now feels a little more comfortable.

"My name is Solace Solester," she states putting her hand out gently for a handshake.

"My name is—" he was going to give her his nickname, but instead opts for his real one. "Bartholomew Johnson." He takes her hand and shakes it. Her hand is very cold, and he lets go of it as quickly as he can without seeming rude.

"Well, Mr. Johnson, it's a pleasure to meet you."

"Same here."

"What are you listening to?" she asks pointing at the box and wires.

"A group called '10,000 Maniacs.' Would you like to listen?" He offers, removing the internal earphones from his ears, and stopping the CD.

"Oh, no. I don't particularly like loud music—"

"It's not loud music." Bartholomew says over a slight chuckle. "Please, here," he hands the earphones to her. "Listen. The name of the group is deceiving."

"These things look like hearing aides." She comments while examining the two little black things. One had an "R" on it, the other an "L".

"I'm sorry, do you have a hearing aid that won't let you put them in your ears?"

"No, I don't," Mrs. Solester notices concern in the young man's voice. "I take it the 'R' goes in my right ear, and the 'L' in my left?"

"You got it." He notices that she has some trouble getting them in. "Here let me help you."

Mrs. Solester lets her hands drop, while the young man insures that the earphones are in correctly. A few of the other riders notice and smile to themselves. Others notice and are suspicious of the boy, wondering what such a horrible-looking creature is up to. Most, however, don't even notice.

"Okay, now tell me if it's too loud." Bartholomew says while lowering the volume in preparation. "Nod when it's the right level."

"Okay," Mrs. Solester answers. She sees his hand move to press a few buttons. She closes her eyes, awaiting some clash of musical instruments and a screaming voice. She never hears those things.

The sound of a softly played piano enters her head. Crisp and smooth, no static or hissing like her records at home. Next, a female beautifully humming and a viola come in together to join the piano melody. It is a nice, soft melody. It goes on for a few seconds, then pauses. Begins again and pauses. When it

begins a third time, the voice begins to sing. The words are beautiful ones. Speaking it seems to Mrs. Solester, and to her alone.

"'My how you've grown.' I remember that phrase from my childhood days too. 'Just wait and see.' I remember those words and how they chided me, when patient was the hardest thing to be. Because we can't make up for the time that we've lost, I must let these memories provide," the female sings.

Mrs. Solester remembers those phrases too. How many times had she said them to friends or to their children (Mrs. Solester wasn't able to have children of her own, and Douglas never commented on that fact). She recalls how when she was a young girl, she couldn't wait to grow up. She always said things like, "It would be so much fun to be older." She constantly dreamed about the future and forgot to live the present. And how she hated having to wait to grow older. Oftentimes, she would sleep during whole days to make the time go faster. Even when she was married, Mrs. Solester was always thinking about the future: Buying new outfits for future dates, seeing secret lovers to make Douglas jealous and hopefully strengthen their love, or complaining how roses had to wilt rather than accepting and cherishing them in their short-lived bloom. Now, however, she realizes all those times, those passing moments that seemed to take forever, are now gone forever, never to be lived or found again. Only traces, mere hints, of those times are captured in memories. Those memories will have to do, for that is all Mrs. Solester has left.

"No little girl can stop her world to wait for me," continues the soft voice.

Mrs. Solester recalls her childhood days and the memories begin to flow. She can mentally replay them, but she can never relive them. Once the memory is in motion she cannot stop it, or change it. The little girl in her mind will do what she always does. There is no way the little girl can stop her world to wait for Mrs. Solester.

"I should have known. At your age in a string of days the year is gone," points out the singer.

Mrs. Solester recalls how when she was young, days were not individual days, but rather strings of days: five days of school, two days of weekend, four day Thanksgiving breaks, two week Christmas breaks, three month summer breaks. Never was there a day that was just a day. Never did she stop and realize that that particular day would never be repeated. "I should have known," Mrs. Solester thinks in her heart.

"But in that space of time, it takes so long," observes the singer.

*How true! I couldn't wait for the next weekend, and then I couldn't wait to be back in school. No matter when it was the next string of days took too long to arrive.*

"Because we can't make up for the time that we lost, I must let these memories provide. No little girl can stop her world to wait for me," repeats the song.

Mrs. Solester recalls memories of her past friends and family. They are all still young and vibrant in these particular memories. She remembers fighting with her sister, Ruth, over who would play with which dolls. She remembers her best friend in kindergarten, Samantha, and how the two of them chased boys

around the schoolyard wearing the lipstick they stole from their moms, ready to kiss the poor victims who couldn't quite outrun them. She remembers comforting Raquel after Bernice's death in the third grade. Solace had to try to explain to Raquel why God would let her best friend burn to death in a closet inside a burning house. It was that comforting and support that led Solace to become Raquel's new best friend. In later years, Raquel commented on how Solace was such a fitting name, "You're my very own solace, my comfort, my easing of grief and loneliness." Tears begin to moisten Mrs. Solester's eyes as she recalls how Raquel, a third grader of a mere eight years of age, had to endure so much pain and torment.

"Every time we say good-bye, you're frozen in my mind as the child that you never will be, you never will be again."

Every time Mrs. Solester recalls memories of her friends, they are like little children, full of energy and vigor. Every time she tries to bid farewell to those who have passed on, they're frozen in her mind. They are alive in ways they never will be again. A couple of teardrops fall out of Mrs. Solester's right eye, the side which the young man cannot see.

"I'll never be more to you than a stranger could be," finishes the singer.

This couldn't be any truer. Douglas, and all the love and happiness he brought to Mrs. Solester comes to her mind with that line of the song. So many occasions, so much time, but now only memories are left. Memories that a stranger could learn; Memories that a stranger could own. She cannot hold Douglas anymore; she cannot kiss him anymore; she cannot love him anymore. And if she can't do those things, then in fact, she will never be more to him than a stranger could be.

There is more to the song, but Mrs. Solester doesn't pay attention to it. She begins to weep, forgetting where she's at or what she's doing.

The young man notices Mrs. Solester's weeping, but is confused as to what to do. He only played a song for her. What could possibly be wrong?

A lady of about 40 years, sitting nearby, notices the whole ordeal. She is one of those who are always suspicious. She thinks that any teenager who dresses in all black and has purple hair must be on drugs. She also thinks that the teenager will go to any extreme to support his habit, even harassing little, old ladies. *Enough is enough*, she thinks. *I'm not going to stand by and watch him hurt that poor, old woman*. She gets up and angrily asks the young man, "What the hell do you think you're doing to this defenseless old lady? How are you hurting her? How are you making her cry?"

The old woman's crying and this other woman's ranting perplex Bartholomew. "I don't know what happened. I only played a song—"

"Well, that's it. It's that damn demon music of yours that's hurting her ears," the intervening woman accuses.

"No, the song isn't bad. It's—"

"Don't lie to me, you little piece of shit!" Interrupts the woman. "Bus driver, stop the bus! This young punk is hurting an old lady."

The bus pulls to the side of the road.

Bartholomew realizes what's happening. He calmly says, "No, you don't understand. I'm not hurting her."

"Sure," answers the woman, yanking the earphones out of Mrs. Solester's ears. "Take your sick music and disgusting self out of here."

"No, wait," he lifts the earphones. "Listen to it yourself."

"I'm not listening to that garbage! Bus Driver, remove this young man."

The bus driver gets out of his seat and moves towards the young man and raving woman. "Son, I think you should get off the bus."

"But I didn't do anything wrong," protests the young man.

"Oh, how you little shits like to lie. Look at her, bus driver!" She points to Mrs. Solester who sits weeping. The woman's finger moves to Bartholomew as she says, "He made her cry."

"No, I—"

The bus driver pulls on the young man's sleeve lightly, quietly saying, "Son, I think you should leave."

"But I paid my bus fair. This isn't even my stop." The young man is confused. One minute he's being nice to an elderly woman; the next he is being kicked off the bus.

The bus driver pulls Bartholomew towards the door saying, "I'll radio the next bus to pick you up. I just think you should get off this bus." The bus driver's eyes glance in the direction of the protesting woman.

"But I didn't do anything," Bartholomew whispers.

"Please, understand, I'm not saying you did. All I'm saying is that it would be better if you got off this bus," says the bus driver smoothly, with an apologetic tone.

The woman chooses this moment to add, "Kick that freak off the bus!"

The bus driver turns to her and says, "Mam, I'll handle this. You just sit down, be quiet, and take care of the old lady."

"But—"

"No 'but's about it, mam. Either you shut up or you can get out with him."

The woman does not want to shut up, but she thinks it's far better than getting kicked off with that weird looking teenager. *Who knows what he might do to me.*

Bartholomew doesn't want to get off the bus. He wants to find out what is really wrong with his newfound friend; however, he doesn't want to hold everyone up. And he surely doesn't want to stay with that crazy woman, so he just grabs his bag and walks off the bus.

Mrs. Solester is so lost in her own world weeping, that she doesn't notice what's happening. And she doesn't snap out until many minutes and miles have passed.

As she starts to regain control of her senses, she notices that there is some strange woman next to her, trying to find out what's wrong. The first thing Mrs. Solester asks is, "Where is Bartholomew?"

"Who, dear?" asks the now-calm woman.

"Bartholomew. The young man who was sitting next to me."

"Oh, he had to leave." The woman decides not to tell Mrs. Solester the truth in hopes that Mrs. Solester can forget the whole ordeal.

"He was such a nice boy, and he had the most marvelous taste in music," says Mrs. Solester so quietly that only the once-ravenous woman hears her.

The woman, now feeling rather stupid, but glad that no one heard the truth, decides to get up and return to her seat.

Mrs. Solester notices that the library stop is nearing and pushes the black tape to signal to stop.

The rumbling bus slows to a stop. Mrs. Solester grabs her envelope and uses all her strength to get up off the seat. She slowly makes her way to the steps and takes even more time to get down them.

As the bus pulls away, Mrs. Solester turns and starts to make her way to the library. While walking to the building, Mrs. Solester begins to see herself once again as a burden to people and society in general. She's a burden to the government who has to give her money and a bus that she can ride on. She's a burden to the bus driver, and she is a huge burden on Priscilla.

Entering the building, Mrs. Solester slowly makes her way to the room where she has for the past ten years done her taxes with Priscilla. She is early and sits on an empty chair with her lone envelope on her lap. She grabs a Kleenex from her purse and wipes her nose, the last remains of her earlier crying incident. Mrs. Solester waits her turn, and hopes Priscilla won't mind wasting a little more of her precious time with an elderly woman.

A man steps out of the room next to Priscilla's and says, "Mam, are you waiting to get your taxes done?"

With a frightened look, like a child caught doing nothing as homework laid to be completed, Mrs. Solester answers, "Yes, I had an appointment with Priscilla at 1:30."

"Oh, so you want to wait for Priscilla?"

"She's done mine for the past ten years, and I like the way she does it." Mrs. Solester has become very used to having her taxes done by Priscilla every year. She has gotten used to this routine, and hopes to never break it.

Priscilla comes out, "Mrs. Solester—"

Mrs. Solester, shaking with nervousness, fright, and joy, holds her tissue tightly, and says, "I know. I'm early for my appointment—"

"That's alright, mam. It's just that I'm supposed to get off work early at one, instead of three today. And I'm already with a man who will take about another hour."

Mrs. Solester shudders as a feeling of sadness and embarrassment runs through her body. "Oh, I see..." She tries to think of something to say. Something that will make Priscilla, her only friend, want to somehow spend time with her.

"R.J. here's right now, and he doesn't have any appointments. He could do your taxes if you'd like." Priscilla says, with a tired look on her face.

Feeling more embarrassed since she already denied his offer of assistance, Mrs. Solester says, "Oh, sure. Okay." Gathering her envelope, she pushes herself up on her weak arms, and after teetering a bit, manages to stand.

"Good. I mean, you've already taken the time to come down here. It would be a pity if it was all for nothing." Priscilla offers with a forced smile.

Later on, R.J. offers Mrs. Solester a ride home, if she waits for him to finish his last appointment.

"I'll take the bus." Mrs. Solester insists. "I'm used to it. I'll take the bus. I've already wasted enough of your time. I shall not waste any more."