

On the side of a lengthy highway running throughout the rural countryside, there stands a lonely structure amongst the forests and the fog. It has remained for the last fifty-eight years. A large wooden sign adorning the upper front of the building reads “Clifton’s Convenience”, in large white letters. As the years passed by, and more highway stations appeared, Clifton’s Convenience refused to evolve, despite the growing mountain of new technologies beside it. Whether it be through ignorance or through brilliance, the quaint store became a novelty, to be appreciated by young and old passersby alike.

Unfortunately, the Cliftons themselves could not be as timeless. By the late months of her life, Iris Clifton had lost the strength to speak, to move, and to care. At times, Arthur Clifton, her widower, had toyed with the notion of putting her to rest early. Yet, he knew she would never have allowed it, and Arthur couldn’t bear to break her wishes, regardless of how stubborn he thought them to be.

He wasn’t alone in his sorrow. On occasion, their son William would visit with his two children. William would hold his mother’s cold, dry hand and recite his youngest memories, while the children played games through electronic screens. Arthur was unbothered. Neither child was above the age of five, and naturally, both had little understanding of death, beyond how uncomfortable it made them. He’d rather they enjoy themselves than join the sobbing orchestra of Iris’s visitors. Still, William scolded the children for this, and profusely apologized to his impartial father.

When the funeral home asked for Iris’s final words, Arthur wished he could remember. Her loud voice that once filled a room had gradually turned to pitiful whispers. All he knew was that she’d despised the hospital bedroom. It was unfamiliar to her, filled with new, innovative technologies. The tray of needles beside her held various manufactured fluids and substances that simply terrified her. She’d always been cautious about what she consumed—her and Arthur still hadn’t smoked—but she was never this cautious. Once, a similar injection could have saved her life, but her veins were tightly guarded by her overwhelming ignorance. Even in her final moments, she had never regretted refusing the injection that could have saved her from this gloomy fate.

The door chime rang for the first time in months as Arthur returned to Clifton’s Convenience. As he flipped the wooden “Sorry, We’re Closed!” sign in the store’s front window, his fingers grazed upon layers of dust. He recalled watching Iris swiftly paint through the grooves of each letter with a thin brush.

Arthur collapsed into the chair behind the checkout counter. Its uneven legs wobbled beneath him. His eyes slowly scouted his surroundings, searching for that friendly feeling that had always blossomed inside the store. Instead, all his eyes could find were tints of yellow sunshine that had seeped through the blinds and stained the white shelves. After months of staring at the same plain white walls that decorated the hospital, he'd expected something so amicable to feel more welcoming.

The next morning, Arthur awoke in the same wobbly wooden chair to a radio ad for a new electric vehicle. In front of him was a book he had tried reading to pass the time, titled "The Older Kind: An Exploration of the Elderly Experience". He hadn't intended on sleeping in the chair, it wasn't the first time he'd spent the night here. This time, however, without a partner accompanying him, it felt freshly pathetic.

Arthur rose from the chair, and once again took in his surroundings. He slowly walked to the backroom to find a replacement for the clothes he'd slept in. All he could find was an old, bright blue uniform that Iris had designed for them to wear while working. He'd never worn his, but he figured it was a suitable time to start.

As he folded the outfit's collar into position, he noticed a bulletin board with two paper cutouts skewered into it. They were from a book of children's names that Iris had owned during her pregnancy. One cutout read:

"Iris: She is the goddess of the rainbow, a delicate reflection of nature's beautiful spectrum. Iris will have an imaginative, carefree soul, and will always shine through the toughest rains."

The cutout beside it read:

"Arthur: He was once a shining leader of the Knights of the Round Table, and now he is restored from his rust by stylish new parents. Arthur will be a noble, valiant soul for as long as his kingdom remains."

He found the description of Iris particularly accurate. Especially in her youth, Iris was a lively person. They'd grown together in a resilient town which had ignored most nearby technological advancements and kept to a strict, traditional way of life. Iris would often convince Arthur to join her on unauthorized escapades. Despite many of these adventures ending in handcuffs, the duo's antics would always reappear not long after. This

continued until William was born. Arthur couldn't remember why Iris had chosen the name William, and she hadn't remembered to post it on the cork board.

A few days later, Clifton's Convenience saw its first customer in months. A young couple entered, drawn by the aged and worn exterior. The woman wore a teal dress that flowed to her ankles, and the man wore a tight red sweater, with a carefree pattern. They strolled throughout the store, pointing to old chocolate bars and soda flavors they hadn't seen in years, laughing and smiling at the memories as they browsed. They'd paid little attention to Arthur, but he still watched them relish their nostalgia, sitting alone behind the clunky vintage cash register.

After the two had paid for their items, Arthur watched their vehicle narrow in the distance. His eyes began to water, and his lips curled in. Tears trickled through his squeezing eyelids, and slowly rolled down his face, passing through wrinkles as they did. His skin turned to a bright, uncontrollable shade of red. Nothing had ever changed at Clifton's Convenience, and yet the world around it had never stopped changing. He only wished he would have been granted a moment to realize it.

That night, Arthur pinned an excerpt he'd cut from "The Older Kind" to the cork board, over Iris's cutouts. It read:

It is the American dream to find love, to find success, and to grow old with the fruits of both. Those who find this fantasy as their truth are ironically those who hate the new age. Time is the one thing they'll never control, and that is a frightening thought for such nuclear people. But to the ones who failed along the way, and to the ones who never even started, the ability to deny that they've become an antiquated novelty would be an incredible, superhuman power.

The door chime shook Arthur from his rest, the chair leaning forward as he woke. In front of him was an evidently wealthy man, no older than twenty. "Hey, sorry. Didn't know you were sleeping." said the man. "I was wondering if you have an electric charging port around here. For a car. I've got one out there, and none of the other places around have one yet."

"No." replied Arthur in a frail tone. He slowly rose from his chair, leaning his hands on the counter for support as he ambled towards the man.

“Alright, thanks anyways.” said the man. Just as he was leaving, a can of soda caught his eye. “Oh man, they still sell these?”

“I suppose I do.” Arthur said as he patted the man’s pocket. “You have a look around, see if there’s anything you like. I’ll just be out for a smoke.” said Arthur as he pushed the door aside, the chime ringing behind him.

Arthur limped towards the electric vehicle. It was sleek, smooth, and had a perfectly polished white color. While it maintained the typical shape, it lacked front grills and a tailpipe. Arthur glanced at his rusty vintage truck and frowned before removing the electric car key from the wallet he’d slyly taken. Arthur paused to stare at the flat metal keycard before opening the door to the car. From the corner of his eye, he could see the man patting his pockets. Arthur started the vehicle and drove as fast as he could. The farther he was, the less he could hear the man’s desperate cries.

The vehicle dashed down the highway. The trees of the forest blended into a garbled mess of browns and greens. The oceans beside him faded away into the sky. The breeze that flew upon his face pushed his wrinkles out of sight. Suddenly, none of it mattered. Not the store, not his son, and not the woman he’d once loved. Her whispers drowned in that electric wind. For the first time in a year, as an unexplainable stream of tears rolled over, Arthur truly smiled.