

My NEW Old Friend

By Lauren Meese

“Help. . . Help!” The faint cry persisted every couple of seconds. It was my first day at the care unit, and already I was needed.

It was in the summer of my sophomore year that I decided to apply for the Hospice of the Valley Teen Volunteer Program. Once accepted, I attended numerous hours of training and orientation. However, no amount of class time could properly prepare me for the job I was undertaking. No one could properly describe the forlorn expressions I would see as I entered each room, the faces of critically ill or dying patients. No one could accurately explain the stale smell that would engulf me as I opened the door to the care home. But most of all, no one could tell me about the overwhelming joy that came with each visit.

That afternoon as I turned the corner, the cries of help reached my ears. I didn't even have time to think. It was an impulse to follow the plea.

I walked in to see a woman slightly raised from her bed, arms outstretched. I asked her what she needed, ready to call the nurse for pain medication or maybe to get the nursing assistant if she required the restroom. To my surprise, all she wanted was comfort, attention, a friend.

I was amazed at how quickly I felt at ease. We talked as if we were old friends,

laughing and catching up on the past. I couldn't help but smile as her face lit up with joy.

Then she said something I'll never forget. “I can tell by your voice that you are a very pretty girl.” This seemed like a rather unusual thing to say to someone. Did she not think my face was pretty? But as I looked at her closer, I realized that she couldn't see my face. She was blind.

That's when my heart dropped. Here was a woman in a strange place, getting treatment from complete strangers she couldn't even see. And I had been thinking about the smell. I had no idea that my cheery voice and undivided attention was bringing so much color into her life. For that, I would smell anything.

I walked out that day with a new attitude. This woman had taught me a valuable lesson. No matter what problems we may be facing, all around us are opportunities to forget ourselves and help another. When those chances come our way, we must make the effort to open our ears and turn our hearts to the ones who seem to be reaching out and calling, “Help.” We may just find a new friend. **NE**

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I was a volunteer, and she was calling for help, but it wasn't the kind of help I was thinking of.

ILLUSTRATION BY JENNIFER TOLMAN

