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The Morning of the Accident

The roads and highways were left wet and slick from the rain that had come and gone just hours ago. The sun played a game of peek-a-boo through the wispy layers of clouds, shining rays of sunlight down to the ground. The light from the sky created a beautiful prism effect atop the vehicles stopped on the Ohio Turnpike. The view on the ground compared to the sky wasn't as attractive as the people sat inside their cars staring at the horrifying scene around them. No one left their vehicle to help the injured, most likely afraid they would get hurt if they got out of their cars, although with all the vehicles already piled up on the highway, there wouldn't be anywhere for an oncoming car to go.

The phones at Franklin and Edon Police Stations rang off the hook after the accident occurred on the Ohio Turnpike. Officer Adanya Moore from Edon arrived at the scene moments after the calls came pouring through. She and a few others jumped in their vehicles and raced to the accident with lights flashing and sirens blaring as they ran through stop lights to get there. Officer Moore and the others from her district weren't the first to arrive at the scene. There were already fire trucks and the state highway patrol surrounding the accident.

Adanya Moore cautiously drove her way around the parked cars congested on the highway with nowhere to go. She stopped when she found a clearing near the accident. She put the truck in park and stared out the windshield with her mouth agape. It was the kind of jaw-dropping reaction you'd have if you walked in on your boyfriend or husband sleeping with another woman and that

woman was your sister or best friend. She was in a state of utter shock. The highway looked like a mass murderer went on a shopping spree. Some vehicles were flipped over; others were smashed with their engines sweltering and smoking. Oil and gas leaked from the vehicles, mixing on the black pavement. The mess would take half the day to clean up, and still there would probably be pieces left on the side of the road.

As Moore scanned the scenery, her eyes stopped on two motorcycles, but no bodies lying nearby. The thought of them being buried under all those vehicles made her feel sick to her stomach. The drivers of the motorcycles didn't have the protection a car or truck had. The chances of them being alive were slim to none.

The scent of gasoline hit her nose the moment she opened the door of her truck and stepped out. Glass crunched under her combat boots as she exited the police SUV. She took in the sight of broken glass scattered on the road; it was everywhere. Her eyes skimmed over the scene, counting the vehicles. There were at least ten.

A fire ignited at the rear of a black sedan. Moore watched as a firefighter raced over with an extinguisher and put it out. She watched as other police officers parked their cars around the accident with their lights strobing to keep out other cars and to direct traffic off the highway to nearby streets. People who were waiting to get off the highway sat in their vehicles and stared at the gruesome scene around them. Some of them were on their cell phones, either filming the accident or calling their loved ones to tell them what had happened and that they were okay. After 9/11 this seemed to be the first thing people did, always filming things that were happening around them.

Helicopters from news stations all around the area hovered above, recording the scene from both eastbound and westbound. The state police were able to get the traffic moving on the

eastbound side of the highway, which was stopped due to a male body in the road. Officer Moore overheard two firefighters, standing twenty feet in front of her, talking about the man on the other side of the highway. Their theories were that the man had been ejected from his vehicle on the westbound side where Moore stood and flew into the grille of a semi-truck on the eastbound side.

The radio secured to Moore's shoulder chirped as one of the other police officers from the scene started talking. She bent her neck so that her ear was pressed against the speaker part of the radio and listened to the conversation.

The male officer stated, "The truck driver said that he had been driving at the speed of 75 mph and didn't have time to stop when the man came headfirst into the grille of his truck. He said he could see the man's eyes watching him, as if pleading for his life, before the impact. The driver said that it happened so fast there was nothing he could do. He couldn't stop the truck in time."

The image of the scene made Moore's stomach turn. *What a horrible thing to witness*, she thought. The poor man wouldn't be able to un-see the accident that had unfolded in front of his eyes. She shook her head in disgust.

Moore drew in a breath as she focused back on the scene at hand. She knew by everyone standing around talking that it would be hours before the chunks of twisted metal and plastic were removed from the scene, allowing traffic on the westbound side to move. The turnpike would be closed until the horrific accident was cleaned up and all the survivors were taken to the hospital, which from the look of things would be multiple hospitals in the area.

Edon Hospital was older by twenty years and had fewer rooms available, especially in the ER. Franklin Hospital, on the other hand, was newer and had three times the rooms, but there would be no doubt that both hospitals would accommodate all the people from the accident.

Nearly two hours had passed as Officer Moore stood near the overturned vehicles with her hands on her hips, watching several firefighters move pieces of car parts away, looking for anyone that might be buried underneath. She was told that there were twelve people injured in the wreck. So far, only two of the twelve were pronounced dead at the scene. Officer Moore wasn't sure how the accident happened, but she knew there had to be someone who saw something and maybe even filmed it. Other officers, including herself, would later be sent to the hospitals to talk to the victims once the highway was clean.

After the firefighters cleared the area and were packing up their things, Officer Moore decided her work here was done too, not that she'd done much with the State Police taking over the highway. They always seemed to take jurisdiction when it came to the turnpike. Granted, she was a local cop in Edon where nothing ever happened, but they called her station out here, not the other way around.

She scanned the scenery one last time; she was sure every officer in both Franklin and Edon was here along with the State Police. "Tax dollars at work," she mumbled. She was about to turn and walk back to her patrol car when she heard a faint cry for help thirty to forty feet in front of her. She held a hand on the duty belt wrapped around her pear-shaped waist as she semi-jogged toward the sound.

She stopped when she came to what once looked like a red crotch rocket, now mangled and torn into pieces from the other vehicles smashing into it. She looked past the motorcycle and saw a dark blue car lying on its hood. The scene looked different from afar, but now that she was up close, she felt queasy. She swallowed as the acidic taste of bile rose up and into her mouth. She pinched her nose and took in another breath. Her heart pounded as panic flowed through her body.

“Come on Moore; you can do this. Don’t show those guys your weakness,” she mumbled to herself.

She blocked the thoughts from her mind and moved around the vehicles. She stopped when she came to the side of a blue Ford Focus flipped upside down. She had seen with her own eyes that the firefighters had already removed the male driver from the vehicle. She scanned the area, looking for any signs of a body or body parts just in case someone was trying to wave, but saw no one. Maybe she had imagined the sound of a person yelling; with all the commotion around her she couldn’t be sure if it were real or not.

She stepped back and was about to head to her car when she heard the cry for help again. It was more of a moan than a yell coming from in front of her, but where? All these cars had been checked and evacuated, hadn’t they? She was sure the firemen had just been in this area and had even taken a person to the hospital. She heard one of the firefighters yell, “All clear.” Had they missed someone? Surely, they had, otherwise she wouldn’t be hearing someone call out for help.

She moved closer to the wreckage. The smell of gasoline became stronger; this wasn’t a good sign. Twenty feet to her right, a car ignited. Flames shot several feet into the air. She knew once it hit the gasoline leaking out from the cars, wherever the gas was, there’d be an explosion. An enormous explosion, and she didn’t have much time to waste. She had to act fast and find this person before it was too late.

“Hello,” Officer Moore yelled. “Is anyone there?”

“Help,” a voice said, sounding muffled by the helicopters still circling above.

She wished the helicopters would leave so she could hear the person calling for help. Moore moved around the pulverized vehicles. She couldn’t run like she used to if this place decided to blow. Now that she reached the ripe age of forty-five, not that she was old, but her body would tell

you otherwise. Besides, running wasn't her forte. Never was much of a runner in school and wasn't one to take it up when she got older. She wasn't sure why people enjoyed the sport. Too much impact on the knees and feet. Her feet and knees hurt enough just walking these days, but she was sure that was due to the weight she'd put on these past couple of years since her dad died.

Officer Moore was careful not to snag her clothes on the sharp metal sticking out from the wrecked cars or to slip on the oil that leaked out from under them. She needed to find the person trapped and get them help. "Whoever you are, keep talking to me if you can!" she yelled over the noise.

"I'm under here," the voice replied. "It's dark, and I think I smell gas. I...I think my leg is caught on something."

She was sure the voice was male. "I'm coming!" Moore shouted as she peered inside the cars that were empty just in case they had missed someone. Maybe they were pinned in the back seat? She knelt to the ground, looking between two vehicles, a Chevy Malibu and a Dodge pickup, when she saw him. The door to the Chevy had been torn off, but she wasn't sure if it was due to the crash or the firemen. But wouldn't they have seen the man stuck under the truck? This she didn't know. Maybe it had been too dark, and they just hadn't seen him. Perhaps he was unconscious at the time and couldn't holler for help? These were things she didn't know but also didn't have time to contemplate.

She stood and yelled, waving to one of the firemen ten yards away. "Over here. I found someone. He's trapped under this truck," Moore said, pointing down at her feet. "Hurry, I smell gas!" she yelled, cupping her hands around her mouth. She had to shout louder than the noise around her.

Two firefighters raced over to where Officer Moore stood and looked under the capsized vehicle. “We need a hydraulic ram to lift the truck up and try to slide him out,” one of the firemen ordered. “Get the fire extinguisher too. We need to stop this fire before it spreads.”

A short and stocky firefighter ran back toward the firetruck and shouted orders to a couple of other firefighters, telling them what was needed. Three firefighters ran back and began working on lifting the vehicle. Within minutes, they had the truck raised high enough to drag the man out from underneath. His clothes were saturated and reeked of gasoline. They had to get him away from the fire spreading toward them.

“Put that fire out!” one of the firemen yelled as he pointed to the flames coming their way.

Officer Moore stood back, watching the firefighters work fast and efficiently. The hydraulic ram gave out and the truck fell to the ground, nearly missing the already injured man’s leg. A firefighter signaled to an EMT that he needed their help and ran over to them, carrying an emergency bag.

The paramedic dropped to the ground and checked the man’s airways and placed a brace around his neck. “Can you tell me your name?” the female EMT asked.

“I...,” the man croaked, fading in and out. Blood covered half his face, making it impossible to identify him.

“Stay with me, sir. You’ve been in a serious accident and may be suffering from head trauma. We’ll get you to the hospital and get you some help.” The female paramedic radioed for her partner to bring a stretcher. They carefully lifted the man and loaded him onto the stretcher and into the back of the ambulance. The ambulance lurched forward before speeding away from the scene with its lights flashing and sirens blaring. Another ambulance drove off behind the one that had just left, both going to the hospital.

Officer Moore placed a hand on her stomach; she still couldn't shake the nausea she had been feeling all morning, along with a few sharp pains in her abdomen and lower back. But that had nothing to do with the accident here today.

In all her years as a police officer, she'd never seen this many people in an accident at one time, especially as bad as this one. There were so many casualties with head traumas, broken limbs, and external bleeding. These images were never going to leave her mind for as long as she lived.

Moore closed her eyes, clearing her mind of the memories of her past that came rushing in and reminding her of what she had left behind. The past was always a reminder of what she did back then, but today it hit her harder than before. She had always wanted to become a police officer just like her dad, and she wasn't going to let anything change that. Change the dreams she dreamt of her whole life. Only she alone had to make the choices she made so many years ago, and every day she regretted what she did. That year was nothing but pain and regret; things she couldn't take back or change once she had walked away. She wasn't sure why this accident reminded her of that moment she tried so hard to forget, or at least put in the back of her mind. Maybe it was because life was a mystery. No one knew when their time was up. How it could all vanish in the blink of an eye.

The sirens around her sounded near and loud, causing her to snap out of her thoughts. She took a step backward, looking down at the ground, almost tripping. She noticed something under the debris at her feet and bent down to get it. It was a black leather wallet. She wiped it off and opened it. Inside was a driver's license, money and a couple of credit cards. She slid out the driver's license and looked at the picture. It looked exactly like the guy they had just taken away.