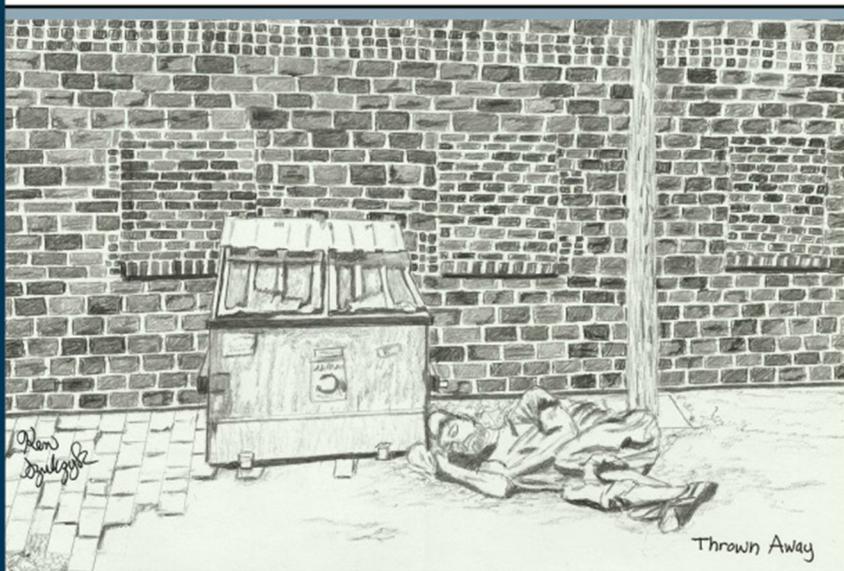


# Thrown Away



Kenneth R. Szulczyk

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Thrown Away

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## **Chapter 1**

I awaken in a small tent and peel the two layers of dirty sleeping bags away my body. I rise, unzip the tent, and crawl to a new, dreary day. Then I close the tent door and zip it up to keep the insects and critters out.

I stand up and look up at the sky as the clouds hide the morning sun. I begin shivering from the cold air. The mornings are becoming colder as winter sneaks closer by the day.

I walk through the homeless camp and walk around the scattered tents throughout the woods. I'm one of the founders of tent city and had pitched my tent near the center where we set our fires. As the years dragged on, others have joined our camp while others have left. It's hard to tell how many people live here in the tent city. Perhaps a 100 or a thousand. We never counted heads.

Then someone begins a long coughing spell, clearing the phlegm and tobacco residues from his throat.

I walk along a winding path through a patch of woods near the city. For the next mile, the trail follows the river until I reach the bridge. Then I walk up the embankment,

climb over the guarding rail, and walk along the sidewalk to the downtown.

Every couple of blocks, I stop walking and cough for a minute from the pollution and smog from the morning traffic. Drivers rush to work during the heavy traffic to clock in before 9 o'clock as they weave in and out of lanes trying to beat the other drivers.

I reach the Homeless Center by 9 o'clock, just in time for a late breakfast. Entering the Homeless Center, I cross the spacious, empty lobby and join the late crowd – the who's who of the lowest of the low. The homeless with jobs and interviews eat at seven along with the other workers in the world while the few homeless mothers rush their children to school.

I stand at the end of the line with the other chronic homeless. Of course, none of us wants to be homeless. We're ashamed of our positions, always looking down, walking around in a trance. Unfortunately, society looks down upon us as outcasts, losers, and failures except the few who take pity on us and help us, like the volunteers in this shelter – God bless them. Unfortunately, most people sit comfortably in their homes along with families as they fill their lives with activities.

I reach the stack of yellow trays and grab the top one. I flip it over, place it on the track that follows the counter and add a fork and spoon. They never give us any butter knives because we can easily steal and sharpen them into weapons. Everyone stands quietly lost in a trance. I slide the tray along the track as the line moves forward.

One helper slops a serving of grits onto a plate and adds a slice of margarine. Another helper uses an ice-cream scoop to form a hill of scrambled eggs next to the grits. Then another adds a burnt patty of sausage and passes the plate over the counter.

I grab the plate and say, "Thank you."

“You’re welcome” the helper replies in a chirpy voice.

I study the new helper. The helpers and volunteers last about a month, always being replaced by the endless pit of students who attend the university nearby. Perhaps they take pity on us and want to help us, or they earn credits as they further their studies in psychology and sociology by studying the rats in their natural habitat.

I continue pushing the tray along the track. Then I add a glass of orange juice, two slices of soggy toast, and a cup of coffee with extra sugar and cream.

At the end of the food line, Fred, a large, jovial man with a neatly clipped, full black beard smiles and says, “Hi Jason.” Then he hands me a small bag filled with the ends of the loaves of bread.

I nod my head and reply, “Thanks Fred,” while slipping the bread into my coat pocket.

I always sit at the same place and begin eating my breakfast, taking my time – of course, I have plenty of time, the only precious commodity that a homeless person can own. I sip my artificial orange juice to help wash down every bite of food. After finishing the meal, I sip my bitter coffee.

We rarely talk or smile while we’re eating, but who can blame us. How can a homeless person who moves from one place to another be happy? We never know where our next meal will come from or what dangers lurk on the streets after midnight, when the decent folks drift off to sleep in their secured homes.

After eating breakfast, I place my tray onto the cart – the silverware goes into the container filled with dish soap while I stack my plate, adding the next level on the tower of plates. Then I place the coffee cup and glass on the middle shelf. I notice the cart has a small trashcan mounted to the end, where the homeless can scrape the removes from their

plates, but we almost always eat our breakfast and rarely throw any food away.

After breakfast, we must leave the shelter unless the weather becomes exceptionally cold outside. On cold winter days, the admin may let us hang around in the lobby for warmth and comfort. Today is a tad chilly, but not enough for them to let us stay inside.

The center wants the homeless to check in if the center has any free beds. They give residents a clean bed, soap and hot showers. Then if we are not working, we must attend classes in life skills, job searches, resume writing, and bible studies. But the shelter overflows with the homeless, and we represent the chronics of the chronic homeless.

As I pass the door to the men's dormitory, Doug opens the door and kicks down the doorstep. Then he yells, "Does anyone need a shower?"

I pause. Then I lift up my right sleeve and sniff my armpit as a strong odor hits my nose because I had not showered in days. I reek like a shit-covered toilet.

I head into the male dormitory and walk past row after row of bunk beds. Every bed is neatly made up with the bed sheets pulled tight. At the end, I take off my coat and hang it up and slip off my boots. The staff always lies out the supplies in a row of tubs. I grab a small bar of soap and tube of toothpaste from the first tub and a towel from the next tub. Entering the large bathroom, I undress near the bathroom sinks. I hold onto the sink to slide off my pants because the dirt and grime hardened them into a hard plastic. I remove several coins and a small toothbrush from my jeans pocket and place it on the sink with the toothpaste.

I toss the old, dirty clothes into a large hamper near the bathroom door and enter a shower stall. The warm water fills good flowing over my body as the water washes the dirt and grime away. Then I move away from the spray of water and apply a thick lather of soap over my hair and body. I

close my eyes and wash my face last. Then I plunge myself into the shower to rinse off.

I stand in the shower for fifteen minutes and let the hot water massage my body. Then I turn off the shower, grab a towel, and begin wiping my body. As I wipe my legs, I spot a red rash spreading across my right thigh. I wince in pain a little when the towel rubs against it. So I pat the rash gently with the towel. Then I wrap the towel around me, grab my coins and toothbrush, and approach the sink.

I look myself in the mirror – a stranger with a hollow face and sunken eyes stares back at me. I don't recognize myself anymore. Street life had quickly aged me; although I am 25 years old, I look like a fifty-year-old man. I'm not sure when this stranger stole my body, and what he did to me, but this stranger refuses to leave.

I grab a tube of toothpaste from the counter and squeeze a healthy squirt onto my brush. I begin brushing my teeth. Then I rinse and spit out the paste into the sink.

I wait near the door as three homeless men enter the bathroom. Then I exit and head to the donated clothes bins. The first bin contains socks while the next one has underwear. The next bin has stacks of neatly folded shirts, and the last contains neatly folded jeans.

I grab a change of clothes that will fit me and put them on while standing near the row of beds, out of the way of the other men. I slip the toothbrush and coins into my pocket and feel the fabric of the dress shirt – “too thin,” I whisper to myself.

I head to the clothes bin filled with old, tattered rags and begin digging for my flannel shirt. I find it near the bottom. Then I slip on the flannel shirt and then I put on my coat and boots and head outside.

I walk the three blocks to the library. After entering the building, I head to the magazine section and always grab the

latest local town newspaper and a magazine or two. Then I hide in a corner away from the patrons.

I read newspapers and magazines every day to occupy my copious free time. I always skip the classified section. With no home or residence, employers just glance over my application. Once I became unemployed for a year, employers never interviewed me. Sometimes, the managers quickly send a rejection letter.

Managers are such suspicious people. If someone has a year gap in their employment history, the managers suspect the applicant is hiding vital information. The applicant must have spent time in prison or in a looney house, or the applicant went on a crime spree robbing gas stations and convenience stores. Then the applicant decides to become a law-abiding citizen again before the police catch them in the act.

I've been unemployed for years. The government considers me relatively healthy with no medical conditions or disabilities, so the government gives me no help. Their motto - all abled-bodied males must work.

I turn the page and spot a story - ABC Fabrication has laid off 500 workers. Wow! I applied at that factory after I was laid off from Taylor Manufacturing. I used to make automotive parts when I was working at Taylor. I made three times the minimum wage with health benefits and pension. I operated an industrial shear at a steel fabrication plant. I would move large sheets of steel or aluminum, onto the table. I measured and drew the cutting lines-remembering the rule - always measure twice and cut once. Then I adjusted the shear, aligned the cutting lines with the shear's bladed. Then I pressed the button that rammed the shear downward with thousands of pounds of force, cutting the metal sheet along the marked line.

Then I heard Taylor Manufacturing experienced financial trouble and had defaulted on their bank loan. The

day I lost my job, the bank sent a company out and repossessed the machines.

At that time, I didn't worry. I collected unemployment benefits and had a pension. I also possessed job skills, but I was wrong. In the beginning, I went to a dozen interviews, but they always found something wrong with my qualifications. They wanted someone who could operate computerized equipment. What the fuck? We were craftsmen. We could outdo any dork with a computer-operated machine. When my unemployment benefits had run out, I found out the company robbed our pension fund, leaving us with nothing.

Of course, I still didn't worry after I spent my savings and lost my unemployment check. If I had known what would happen, I would have bought a better quality tent and top-notch camping equipment.

I turn to the next page on the newspaper.

One of the librarians walks around, doing her hourly rounds. She spots me but passes by today without saying a word. The staff usually leaves me alone if few patrons are visiting the library. If school students show up or more patrons visit the library, then they may ask me to leave. After that shower, I imagine my stink cloud had shrunk, so she probably didn't smell me today until she had walked past me.

After several hours in the library, I walk the five blocks to sit on a park bench near the river, but I must be careful. I always avoid the teenagers who rarely come to this park – those cruel bastards. They always say the most insulting and disgusting things such as “Get a job you lazy bastard,” or insults that include me performing various sex acts with my mouth and tongue on various parts on their bodies for the change in their pockets. Then I read the stories when some teenage bastards doused a homeless guy with lighter fluid

and set him on fire, or they hurled a large rock on a homeless person's head while he slept on a park bench.

I pull a bread end out of the bag, tear each slice into several pieces, and toss them to the pigeons. I always like feeding the pigeons because they never judge me or look down upon me. They eagerly gobble those crumbs from a homeless man.

I break the bread into five or six pieces and toss each crumb to a bird. The bread quickly goes as the birds fight over the crumbs. Then the birds scatter after they had eaten all the crumbs.

I just stare at the river and dream of a different life - a life with a job. Perhaps that life would include a wife or girlfriend waiting at home, or a couple of kids who would run to the door screaming, happy to see their dad enter the house after a day of work, but I have no one.

I have no mother; I have no father; I have no grandparents, no sons, and no daughters. My parents and grandparents died long ago, leaving me alone in this cold, cruel world. I have a brother and sister, but I stopped talking to them after my mother had died. They fought over my mother's things while I shook my head in disgust. At that time, I had a good job with a nice apartment and a good used car.

It was so long ago. I don't remember the last time when I visited a relative's house, or received a phone call, or hugged a loved one. I have no one to call during holidays and birthdays, and I always dread my birthday because I have walked one step closer to my final resting place. Of course, my death does raise a good question - what will the state do with my body after they find me dead on a sidewalk or decomposing in the woods.

Time hurls the ultimate cruelty upon the homeless because time only informs me when I get my meals at the charities and homeless centers and how much time I have

remaining in the day. I don't have to clock in for a job, or attend a business lunch at a restaurant, or be on time for a meeting at the office. Time only possesses meaning for people with jobs and somewhere to go with something to do. I have nothing as the cruel hands of time tick ever so slightly. I stopped wearing a watch years ago because I would always glance down at my watch every minute or two and the watch's hands would never move.

After a while, I rise from the park bench and head to the art museum. Only entering the vestibule, I glance at the oversized clock on the wall - noon approaches and time for lunch.

Pedestrians fill the sidewalks as they scramble to their favorite lunch place.

I walk along the sidewalk while everyone walks around me. They never look in my direction as they pass. Although people surround me, I'm completely invisible.

As I walk, a well-dressed man in a navy business suit walks towards me. He glances in my direction and quickly looks away. Everyone walks by and never notices me as if I don't exist.

I imagine if I dropped to the sidewalk dead, everyone would walk over me - never thinking twice to see whether I needed medical attention. Once my body began to smell and bother the pedestrians, then the city would come along and scoop me up.

I walk to the Rescue Mission where they pass out sack lunches to the homeless. I stand in line with the others as the line moves quickly. I advance towards a thin guy wearing a white dress shirt, blue tie, and dress pants.

"God be with you, my brother," he says while handing me a lunch sack.

"Amen," I reply. I grab the bag and walk away.

I don't bother to peek inside the bag to see its contents. It's not that I'm a stingy bastard, but I already know what's

inside - two bologna-cheese sandwiches, carrots sticks, a packet of six peanut butter crackers, and a can of generic soda. God bless them for caring even though the city discourages the churches and good folks from feeding the homeless. Unfortunately, the city would rather sweep us into the sewer gutters and forget about us.

I return to the camp.

As I approach the camp, several men huddle around the campfire while sitting in lawn chairs. A large pot of stew simmers on the edge of the fire as it sits on two bricks while flames lick the bottom of the pot.

## Chapter 2

As I approach, a young man jumps up from the seat next to Bob. Bob, one of the first residents of tent city, must be in his 50s and almost completely bald. Of course, he seems to enjoy his homeless predicament, unlike the rest of us.

As I sit down next to Bob, he asks, "Jason, did ya hear?"

"Hear what?" I reply.

"The sheriff plans to clear us out on Friday."

"Clear us out? Why?"

"We're violating the law." Then Bob hands me the official eviction notice and adds, "We're squatting on city property, and these tents don't meet city code. Two police officers carrying rifles and a code officer came out today and said we have until Friday. If we're still here, they'll remove us... By force if necessary."

I glance at the notice and hand it back to Bob. I mutter, "shit." Then I bend my head back and close my eyes.

Bob asks, "What're plans?"

I open my eyes and stare at Bob, "What do you mean?"

"What do you want to do about this?"

“What can I do? Oh sure, I can go to the pawnshop and get my rifle back. Then I can shoot at the officers as they approach us.”

Bob bursts out laughing along with the other members sitting near the circle. Once the laughter settles down, Bob adds, “Just make sure you don’t hit one of us.”

“Don’t worry,” I reply. “I’m a terrific shot. Of course, I lost that rifle years ago. The pawnshop gives you two months to reclaim your items. After that, they sell it to anyone who wants it.”

“I hear ya, man.”

Tony calls out, “Oh Jesus. Oh Jesus. What’ll we do? Please lord, give us a sign.”

“Don’t worry Tony. We’ll just have to pack and get. We’ll find another spot to camp,” I say.

“But it ain’t right,” Tony says while clutching a bible while tears form in the corner of his eyes. “We’re not hurting anyone. We just want to live here in peace.” Then Tony begins quoting a bible passage, Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

“Amen brother. God knew what he was talking about. Like I said, it don’t matter. It has nothing to do with right or wrong. The police view as weak, and they’re strong. They want us gone, and they know they can kick us around. What can we do? Go hire an attorney and sue those bastards. No one cares about us. They know they can do anything to us, and we’ve got no choice in the matter. We’ll just have to get when they come.”

“Do you want some soup?” Bob asks.

“No man. I’ve got my lunch right here.”

I open the lunch sack and pull out the first sandwich and bite into it. Don’t get me wrong – the soup smells

wonderful, but I don't want to abuse Bob's hospitality. We consider Bob the wise elder in our camp.

I take another bite of the sandwich. Then I feel my throat tighten as the food becomes lodged there. I pull the can of soda out of the bag, pop the top, and swallow a gulp clearing the roadway to my stomach.

"Do you have any ideas where we can move?" Bob asks.

"We can follow this river and see where it goes. I think it leads to some old factory buildings. Then residential neighborhoods after that."

"Fuck the po-pos. We're staying right here," Nathan threatens as he leans against a tree and smokes a cigarette.

"They'll throw your ass in jail. We've got no defense against them," I reply.

Nathan chuckles, takes another puff from his cigarette, and adds, "Shit. You think I'm afraid of jail." Then Nathan starts punching the air in front of him, pummeling an invisible enemy.

"Okay. We'll see." I pull the second sandwich out the bag and continue eating.

"I think you're right. There's a bunch of abandoned factories about a half mile away. We probably can squat in one of the buildings during winter," Bob says.

"Yeah, I think that'll work. We'll set up a new camp. Besides, I don't think the police are following us around, or at least I hope they're not."

"What ya talking about? If I sat on a street corner asking for donations, the police would be there in 10 minutes to arrest me."

"Maybe they do follow us around a little. But we should try to squat in the factory for winter and come back here in spring. It took the police some time to find us. We've been here at least two years."

"Yeah, that's right. It took those dumb motherfuckers two years to find us out here," Nathan adds.

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On Friday, I awaken early as darkness still covers the landscape in a blanket of blackness. I mumble, "Today's the day."

I lie on my back and close my eyes, thinking about high school - wishing I could return there and start over. Everything could've been different. I wouldn't have hung out with that group of losers - drinking and smoking at every chance we could get, even coming to class high half the time. I could've studied harder and hit the books. I could've asked Cheryl out - a nice girl who occasionally glanced in my direction during algebra.

Don't get me wrong. I've been with several women in high school - if you can call the sluts hanging out at the pool hall women. With the pool hall girls, I just needed a couple of wine coolers and the backseat of a car. But things have changed! I'm sure the pool hall girls would never look at me now, unless they fantasize about doing it with some homeless guy. I think I will be waiting for that to happen for a long time.

I open my eyes and mumble, "It doesn't matter. That was a long time ago; Now, I'm a different person. I'm on the bottom rung on society's ladder and still struggling to hold on."

I peel the sleeping bags from my body. Several joints in my legs pop as I roll over and get on all my hands and legs. I unzip the tent and pull out the sleeping bags. Then I pull out my hiking backpack that served at my sleeping partner. I roll each sleeping bag tightly and fasten it to the bottom of the backpack. Then I pull out my clothes and stuff them in the backpack, one by one.

Then I spot a half-bottle of Wild Turkey. Probably got too drunk one night and the bottle slipped deep under my

sleeping bags. I grab the bottle, hold it to eye level, and study the amber liquid for chunks. The contents look pristine and clear.

“Are you saving that, Jason?” Bob calls out.

“I sure am. Tonight, we’ll celebrate tonight at our new place.”

“That sounds like a plan. I can get another bottle.”

“Cool. We’ll celebrate at our new place tonight.” I shove the bottle into a side pocket on the backpack. Then I pull the stakes up and pull the rods out, and neatly fold the tent. Then I stuff the tent carefully into the backpack. I fasten the tent poles to the side of the backpack and slip the tent stakes into a side pouch.

I shake my head back and forth and feel depressed because I packed all my belongings into a backpack. Then I hoist the backpack onto my back slipping the straps over my shoulders.

“Do you think you can help me?”

I turn to Bob while he’s still packing, stuffing everything into a large chest.

I unslung the backpack and start helping Bob pack. After 20 minutes, we have packed everything tightly into the chest.

“Where’re we carrying this to?” I ask.

“If you can help me get this to down to the utility road. Then I’ll get my car.”

I re-shoulder my backpack, grab a lawn chair and tucked it between my arm and body, and grab one handle of the chest.

Bob grabs the other lawn chair with one hand and uses the other hand to grab the other chest handle.

We heave up the chest and begin making our way to the utility road. As one of us hits a bump in the forest, the chest tries to wiggle free, but we finally make it to the utility road without dropping it.

“Could you wait here, while I’ll go get the car?”

“No problem, man.” Of course, I’ll miss this morning’s breakfast at the center, but I respect and trust Bob unlike the other unsavory homeless in our camp.

Bob hikes down the road to the city while I unslung the backpack and sit on the chest and wait.

After an hour, I spot a red Honda Civic making its way along the bumpy road. The suspension moans and squeaks every time Bob hits a bump or pothole in the road.

Bob shuts the car off and hops out, “Sorry for the delay. I hit some bad traffic on the road.

“No problem. I didn’t have much to do.”

“I tell you what – breakfast is on me. Nothing fancy of course.”

My pride wants me to refuse, but I know breakfast will be spectacular. Besides, I already missed breakfast at the center.

We pack everything into the trunk including my backpack. Bob drives farther up the road to a small clearing. Then he turns the car around and heads to the city, to his favorite diner.

After fifteen minutes, he slows down in front of this small diner and turns into the parking lot filled with cars. He parks the car behind the diner, and we head inside.

As we sit in a booth near the entrance, a waitress heads over and passes out the menus, “What’ll you have?”

Bob hands the menu back and says, “I’ll have a Western omelet, hash browns, and coffee, please.

I return the menu and reply, “I’ll have the same, please.”

“It’ll be a 20 minutes for the omelets and hash browns, guys.”

Then the waitress walks to the window of the kitchen and clips the order on a small turning wheel.

Then she grabs a pot of coffee and rushes to our table. She flips the coffee cups and fills them to the brim. Then she

walks around the diner filling everyone's coffee cup, or at least the ones who are drinking regular coffee.

"Today's the big day," Bob says as he pours cream into his coffee and stirs it.

"I know. I plan to go back and watch it."

"Why? They are a bunch of dirty, corrupt bastards. They'll arrest you and throw you into a jail cell."

"So! They can't take anything from me. They can't squeeze money out of me because I don't have anything. If they want to cram me into a cell, then at least they'll have to feed me, but it'll cost them."

"I see your point."

I dump a lot of cream into my coffee and add about four packets of sugar.

Bob jokes, "Well buddy, you'll have diabetes in no time."

I chuckle and reply, "Diabetes is the least of my worries. It's not that I like sweet coffee, but I try to pack on the calories whenever I can. I never know where I'll get my next meal."

After a few minutes of silence while we sip our coffees, Bob blurts out, "So what's your story?"

"My story? Why?"

"We've got time to kill, and everyone has a story."

"Well, my story is pretty simple. I worked for a company that went under. I thought I could find another job, and look where I am today. What about you?"

Bob chuckles and replies, "That is a long story."

"We have nothing but time, so what's your story?"

"My story's different. I was helping my friend paint the outside of his house. I knew I should have known better, but I climbed a ladder on unsteady ground. After I reached the top, the ladder fell over with me on it, and I landed square on my back."

"But I thought you were hurt at work? That's why you collect disability."

"My friend gave me a bottle of pain killers. I plopped two or three while heading to work the next morning. The pain was excruciating, but I made it in without anyone noticing. Then I slipped and fell on my back in the break room near the water dispenser with a dozen people watching. This time, I didn't get up. My boss had to call an ambulance."

"Where did ya work?"

"I worked in an office for the city government. I processed claims for the city."

"So you had a good job?"

"It was a great job, but that wasn't the problem."

"It sounds like you could've returned to work?"

"Yeah, but it was my woman. During the first week at home, I lied on the couch in front of the TV. My wife served my meals and drinks whenever I asked, but she always gave me these cold looks, as if I were no longer a man. Then after a week, she packed her suitcases and returned to her mother's in California."

"What? I thought the wedding vow was until death does the couple apart."

"Apparently, she forgot that part of the vow. Well, at least I didn't kill the bitch, even after she sicced her attorney on me. I never talked to her again. She always had her attorney talk for her."

"What happened in divorce court?"

"I never went. She realized the divorce would be messy, so we settled out of court. I gave her everything she wanted if she would leave the disability check alone. She sold the house and took the bank accounts, or at least the ones she knew about, and I signed the divorce papers."

"Damn, she cleaned you out."

"That's okay. We're done now. She's someone else's problem now."

The waitress hurries over carrying a tray with our breakfast on it.

I pick up a fork and begin cutting and eating the omelet - a taste of heaven compared to the meals at the homeless center. Then I tear a corner off the hash browns and plop it into my mouth using the fork. I close my eyes and slowly chew the food, savoring every little bite.

"The breakfast is really good here."

I swallow, sigh, and add, "Damn good."

"What happened to your wife, or ex-wife I mean?"

"She found some sucker to marry her. Well at least we didn't have kids."

"Well at least being homeless has an upside - no women."

"Says you, but I did learn my lesson. If that urge strikes me, I just rent the woman by the hour. It's definitely a lot cheaper than marrying one."

"Didn't you ever want to return to work?"

"Why? After I lost the house, I thought why go back. I just wanted to enjoy the rest of my life. So I went camping, permanently. That way, I could stretch that disability check."

"Camping, is that what you call it?"

"Hell yeah! I fish when I want to. I read books, play video games, watch tv. I don't ever have to work again. I can enjoy the rest of my life. I'm done with work."

I take another sip from my coffee and study Bob while he's eating his food. He's happy and actually content with life - definitely an odd bird among the homeless.

"Maybe you should have bought an RV or a bigger car to sleep in than the woods."

"I could've, but the damn city passed an ordinance. If a cop catches you sleeping in a vehicle, he'll impound the

vehicle. Then you must pay the city a fortune to get the vehicle back."

"It's like the city has criminalized homelessness."

Then he looks up at me, smiles, and adds, "They sure have. Isn't it great to be outlaws?"

"It's really fantastic. Why didn't I choose this life sooner."

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I leave my stuff at the new camp at the abandoned factory and walk to the homeless camp. I see half the residents are leaving the camp as they carry and drag their stuff to the abandoned factory.

I sit leaning my back against a pine tree near the spot where I pitched my tent. Now that spot is a square of dead grass and weeds.

Nathan leans against a tree, smoking a cigarette.

Someone shouts, "Here they come."

Nathan stomps the cigarette against the tree to put it out and flicks the butt into the bushes.

Cops surround everybody.

Nathan growls, "What do you want?"

Two large officers approach Nathan, and an officer screams, "Get your hands up."

Nathan makes a tst sound with tongue and raises his hands slowly while he grins.

"Do you have any weapons or drugs on you?"

Nathan continues grinning and says, "Nope!"

"Raise your hand up high," an officer commands.

Nathan raises his hands higher as his grin widens.

"Do you have any needles or sharp objects in your pocket?"

"Nope!" Nathan replies.

Then an officer thrusts his left hand into Nathan's coat pocket.

"Officer, you're violating my rights. I have the right..."

The officer screams, "You have no rights." Then he pulls his hand out of Nathan's pocket and punches Nathan hard in the stomach.

Nathan falls to the ground holding his stomach while the other officer jumps on top of Nathan's back, screaming, "Stop resisting! Stop Resisting! Stop Resisting! ..."

Then the officer plants his knee on the back of Nathan's neck while the other officer grabs Nathan's hand one by one and handcuffs Nathan's hands behind his back.

Nathan yells, "I want my attorney! You violated my rights! You bastards violated my rights!"

Both officers pull Nathan up. Then one officer leads Nathan to the paddy wagon while Nathan jerks back and forth, trying to free himself.

The officer who tried to search Nathan's pockets approaches Tony.

Tony holds the bible in his right hand, closes his eyes, and recites, "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."

"What did you say," the officer screams.

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also shall become my salvation."

"Oh, a wise ass!"

Two other officers join the mean officer and surround Tony.

"Get your hands, now."

Tony raises his hands while still clutching the bible in his right hand.

The mean officer grabs Tony's hands, knocking the bible out of his hand, and cuffing Tony's hands behind his back.

"Officer, my bible."

The mean officer stomps on the bible with this foot while he shouts, "Here's what I think of your god."

An officer leads Tony away to the paddy wagon while the mean officer approaches me.

He commands, "Get up slowly with your hands up."

I obey and rise slowly with my hands up.

"Do you have any needles or anything sharp in your pockets?"

"No," I reply.

The officer begins searching my pockets, but I don't have anything.

Another large officer approaches and says, "The vans are full. We can't take anymore."

The officer who had checked my pockets says, "This is your lucky day." Then he punches me in the stomach, and I drop to the ground and curl into a fetal position.

After ten minutes, I feel better. I crawl to the tree and prop myself into a sitting position with my back against the tree.

I see two police vans filled with members of our homeless community. Nathan sits in the last row while he screams profanities at the officers, twisting and contorting his body trying to break the chains.

Then I see a team of city workers dragging tents and sleeping bags and our supplies, and toss them into the bed of a large pickup truck.

The officers and city workers return to their vehicles, climb in, and drive away. And, the woods became quiet.

An old homeless man sees me and approaches. I think his name is Richard, but I'm not sure. He says, "I see they left you behind too. Oh lord, please forgive them."

He helps me to stand up. "Do you think they'd do this to Jesus?" the old man asks.

"I don't want to disrespect Jesus, but I'm not sure they would give Jesus a break. Wasn't Jesus homeless?"

“No, not Jesus.”

“Well, he never lived in a house, and he walked from town to town saving people, didn’t he?”

“Huh um. Yes, he did.”

“Doesn’t it sound like he was homeless?”

“Yeah, but it was Jesus.”

“I know, and some things never change, but at least we are more civilized. We wouldn’t nail Jesus to a cross today, but they probably would throw Jesus into a looney bin and pump his veins with anti-psychotic medications.”

“Yeah, right. The state can no longer afford to pay to send people to psychiatric hospitals. They’d just throw him into a cold jail cell and let him rot there for years.”

Then I notice Nathan’s pack of cigarettes and lighter lying on the ground. I’m not sure why I did it, but I bend down to pick them up and stuff them into my winter coat pocket. And, I don’t even smoke.

Then I walk to Nathan’s bible and pick it up. I open it and read the first passage I see, “Proverbs 3:5-6. Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”

Then I close the book and slip it into my winter coat with the cigarettes and lighter.

\*\*\*

We have been living in the factory for a week. After returning from the city to get my daily meals, I enter the break room in the old factory.

Bob sits upright on his cot, lowers the newspaper, and says, “Did ya hear about Nathan?”

“No,” while I shake my head back and forth.

Bob hands me the paper where he had circled a small story on the last page. “He died in jail. The police said he

committed suicide by strangling himself with his shoelaces wrapped around the neck.”

“That doesn’t make sense. The police always took my shoelaces during my visits there.”

“Bingo,” Bob shouts.

“Those sons of bitches.”

I sit down on the lawn chair next to Bob as my heart races while my face reddens. Then I yell, “Those sons of bitches.”

I know Nathan was young, immature, a little misguided, but he didn’t deserve to die, but the police must use some people as examples. They show the public who’s in charge, and what they can do to us. That way, they keep everyone in line.

Well, we can only do one thing to a bully, and it’s not talking about touchy, feel-ly stuff. Someone must stand up to a bully, and give him his own treatment and make him swallow his own medicine.

I begin thinking. Being homeless is the worst feeling a person can experience. I wouldn’t wish homelessness on my enemies. I feel horrible, useless, and defective, and society will just not let me be. Society interferes with me any chance it gets, reminding how worthless I am.

Bob passes a bottle of Jim Beam, “Here man. Here’s to Nathan.”

I make a toast to the heavens, “Here’s to Nathan,” and I gulp down a large swallow.

Then I begin thinking how I can avenge Nathan’s death. Those sons of bitches must pay.

### **Chapter 3**

I search through the old factory, going through the rubbish and trash that lies scattered in every room. I carefully lift the rubbish on each pile because I don’t want to

anger the rats, raccoons, and other critters by disturbing their homes.

Then I see an old door that had rusted shut.

Utilizing a long iron bar, it takes half an hour to pry the door open. After the door has squeaked open, I let my eye adjust to the darkness before entering. I see old, rusty shelves filled with bottles and containers of chemicals.

I look at the various containers and use my hand to brush the cobwebs and the thick layer of dust off them to read the labels. Then I tilt the label towards the light entering the doorway to read the labels.

After going through half the chemicals on the shelves, I find success. I smile as I dust off small glass bottles of paint thinner with the caption below the name - Extremely flammable. Keep away from fire. I slip one of the bottles of paint thinner into my pocket.

The next morning, I walk along the old trail along the river that snakes through the old homeless camp. I pass our old camp and keep walking. Then I search for a scrawny, five-foot, oak tree.

After walking for 10 minutes, I spot the tree about 10 feet from the path.

While approaching the tree, I can't see the flat stone rock because a layer of dead leaves covers the forest floor. I brush the leaves away from the tree and uncover a flat rock. I look around to ensure other people are not lurking around.

Then I crouch on my knees and move the rock to the side. I try to dig into the dirt with my hands, but the dirt has frozen together.

I spot a small tree branch nearby, grab it, and plunge it into the earth to loosen the soil. Finally, I begin digging and uncover a freezer zip-lock bag with a small metal lockbox inside.

I hid my ID, important papers, and a stack of 20-dollar bills inside the box. I slip a twenty-dollar bill from the stack and stuff it into my pocket.

Then I pick up the photo of my mother and study it.

I return the photo to the lockbox, close the lid, and tuck the box into its zip-lock bag and rebury my booty. Although most the homeless at the camp are honest people, we have several thieves who steal everything and anything.

I replace the stone marker on top the soil and use my hands to cover the area with leaves again.

Then I head down to the city for breakfast at the Homeless Center.

\*\*\*

After taking a sack lunch from the Rescue Mission, I walk around the downtown for a while. I don't know what possesses me, but I'm walking around while a light snow begins falling to the ground on this cold, dark November day.

While walking past the closed down cinema, I see the bubble gum machine of a police car parked in front of a large grocery store – Perry's Supermarket. The lights are switched off, and the car sits quietly.

I notice the cop car has an open window on the driver's side, just open a crack.

I stop and pull out a winter hat with the missing top fuzzy ball out of my jacket pocket. I jerk the hat down onto my head until it almost covers my eyes. I tug on each glove on my hand, tightening the gloves. Then I change direction and head towards the police car.

While approaching, I pull out Nathan's old pack of cigarettes and lighter, and light a cigarette up and inhale the first drag.

As I draw near the car, I read the propaganda on the side - To Protect and Serve. I mumble, "So that's what the state calls it."

I look around and see no one in the parking lot. It's around 3 o'clock and most people are either working in warm offices or sitting on a warm couch at home watching TV. People rarely trek outside when temperatures dip below freezing.

I reach the front of the car and turn to look at the front doors. I don't see anybody because a thick frost covers most the store's glass windows. The cop must be in the office towards the back - probably arresting a shoplifter like one of my homeless buddies - searching for a little liquid antifreeze to keep the body warm.

I pull out the bottle of paint thinner and twist the cap off, holding it upright. I slip the bottle through the open window and slip the cap into my pocket.

The bottle lands on the driver's seat as the fluid gushes out.

I grab the cigarette from my mouth and mumble, "Here's for Nathan, you sons of bitches. I snap the butt off the cigarette and slip the butt into my pocket while I toss the lit cigarette into the window.

BOOOOOSH!

I walk past the police car to the three-foot wall forming the edge of the parking lot. The wall separates the parking lot from a busy thoroughfare. I grab the top of the wall and hurl myself over.

After landing on the other side, I peek over the wall to see what I've done. The fire burns a bright orange that lights the dark parking lot while heavy black smoke pours out of the open window. I smell the pungent smell of burning plastic filling the air.

Bystanders gather outside the store's entrance while a police officer runs toward his car. He opens his eyes wide

and screams into his walkie-talkie as he watches his car burn.

I duck and begin walking along the sidewalk on the other side of the wall, where the officer and bystanders can't see me.

I continue walking to the intersection and cross it and turn right. I walk one block and then I turn left. I hear the sirens of the fire truck approaching.

Then the fire truck passes by with its flashing lights and sirens blaring.

Then I continue walking in a zigzag direction towards the homeless camp. One block I make a right, the next I make a left.

Then I see my old liquor store. I walk to the entrance and toss the cigarette butt into the overflowing ashtray on top of a trashcan. I duck inside for a couple of minutes to shake off the coldness. I figure if I must go away for a while, I'd want to spend a little time with my old friend - Jack, so I bought a pint of Jack Daniels and slip it into my winter coat.

I walk by the Homeless Center and see the open Thrift Store next door. I enter the Thrift Store, and the young clerk sets his book on the counter and looks up at me, "Hello Jason. It's been a while."

"Yes, it has. I've meant to come in. I got a new voucher for some clothes, something a little warmer."

"By all means, help yourself. We have some new winter clothes. I've just put them on the shelves this week."

"Great," then I head to the racks and choose a new winter coat, making sure it's different from the winter coat I'm currently wearing. Then I grab a new knitted winter hat with its fuzzy ball on the top and a thick sweater."

I approach the counter and pull the coupon out and hand it to the clerk.

"What'd do you want me to do with my old coat?"

He studies my tattered clothes. "Unfortunately, we can't reuse your coat."

"I understand."

He returns to reading his book while I slip off my old coat. I put the sweater on, the new coat, and the new hat. Then I put Nathan's cigarettes, lighter, and pint of Jack into my new coat.

I head outside with the old coat folded under my hands. Then I toss the old coat into the dumpster behind the store and head home.

I enter the abandoned factory around five and see Bob sitting on the lawn chair while he stares at his portable TV.

He looks up at me, "Did ya hear?"

"Hear what?" I reply.

"Someone set a police car on fire in downtown about two hours ago.

"No shit! Who would do something crazy like that? That must explain why I saw a fire truck speeding past me when I was coming home."

He turns the screen so I can see the news on his portable TV. A fireman recoils his hose while the reporter pans to the police car. The outside of the car looks fine, but the fire completely ruined and blackened the interior.

A news reporter says, "The police are following leads and searching for a suspect or suspects. If anyone knows who done this, please contact the police at 5-5-5 and 5-5-5-5."

"Damn," I mutter and add, "That's crazy!"

"Jason, just be careful. This world is filled with some real crazies."

"Boy, ain't that no lie."

Bob pulls out a bottle of Jim Bean and shows it to me, "I thought we could share this."

"Thanks man, but I thought I would spend a little time with my old friend - Jack." Then I pull the pint out and show it to him.

"Ole Jack. He's an old friend I haven't seen him in a while too."

"Let me have my lunch and then we can visit our old friend."

"Sounds like a plan."

\*\*\*

I know I jammed a stick into a beehive, and the angry bees are swarming, wanting to sting anyone nearby. The police start harassing the homeless regularly, searching for the suspect who torched the police car.

Bob runs into the break room in a frenzy, and he's royally pissed off. He yells, "The police pulled me over. They said I swerved too much and crossed the yellow line. Then those bastards made me take everything out of my car and place them on the side of the road. And those bastards laughed the whole time while I did this."

"Damn, that's messed up. Let me take a whizz, and we can start drinking."

Then I jog to the storage room and start pouring all the flammable liquids from the small bottles into a 5-gallon gas can - an old red, metal can made decades ago, when Americans actually used metal to make things. After twenty minutes, I fill the gas can at least three-quarters full. Then I place the small empty bottles near the door in four rows across and five deep.

I return to the break room and Bob sits in his chair, completely quiet while his face remains a bright red.

I pull out a pint of Jim Beam I've been saving, and let Bob do the honors.

Bob twists the lid and takes the first swig.

I pull out a cigarette from Nathan's pack.

When Bob sees me light up a cigarette, he asks, "I didn't know you smoked?"

"I don't, but this is a special occasion."

"Those are Nathan's, aren't they?"

"Yeah, I thought I would smoke them in his honor."

"Could you give me one too?"

I toss him the pack, and he takes one and lights it up.

After he exhales the first drag, he lifts up the bottle of Jim Bean in a toast, "To Nathan," and takes a large gulp. Then he mumbles, "I wish someone would teach those bastards a lesson."

He passes the bottle to me, and I repeat the toast, "To Nathan."

\*\*\*

The next morning, I go to the storage room and grab two bottles and slip each one into my winter jacket pocket. Then I hide Nathan's cigarettes and lighter on the top shelf in the back where no one could see them.

I walk through the woods to get my breakfast, and once I make it half way into the woods, I hurl one bottle far into woods. The bottle hits a tree and shatters into thousand shards of glass. I throw the other bottle, and it hits a tree with a ting and falls on top of the snow.

I know it'll take me two weeks to dispose of all the small glass bottles. Of course, I don't want to litter, but I can't carry the bottles into the city and throw them away in the various trashcans and dumpsters scattered throughout the city. Although the police aren't the brightest fruits in the salad, they only got to catch me with one bottle, and they'll know I was the one who torched the police car.

Today's coldness bites and burns my exposed skin as if hot metal is singeing my skin. Large areas on my legs are chapped from the lack of moisture, and my legs burn every time the pant leg brushes over them.

I make it to breakfast with no problems and then retrieve my sack lunch around noon.

As I'm walking home on the sidewalk, a squad car screeches to a halt next to me.

Two police officers jump out the car and surround me.

"Get your hands up," an officer demands.

I notice each police officer has their right hand resting on top of the gun holster.

I raise my hands.

The officer yells, "Do you have anything sharp in your pocket?"

"No sir," but before I could finish my sentence, the officer already stuck his hands into my coat pockets, searching for contraband.

His smile deepens as he pulls out my sack lunch, "What da we got here?"

He rips the bag open while his smile inverts upside down, "What the..."

My sandwich, crackers, and soda fall to the ground. Then the officer begins stomping on my food.

Then he continues searching my pockets and yanks out my bible.

He throws the bible onto the ground.

The officer yells, "I should take you in for littering, and... and... vagrancy, loitering, and, and, and disturbing the peace" while he clenches and unclenches his fists, as if he is preparing to punch me.

"Hold on Frank. Let's not lose our cool."

Frank slips his hands into his thick coat.

"We just want to ask you some questions."

"Okay. Can I lower my hands?"

"Sure, but keep them where we can see them." He pulls out a small writing pad from his coat pocket while keeping his eyes on me. Then he begins, "What's your name?"

"Jason. Jason Mathews."

The officer scribbles this information in a little book.

"Do you have your ID?"

"Sorry sir, but I haven't had an ID in a while."

"When were you born?"

I pause for a second and start thinking.

"When's your birthday, dirt bag?" the mean officer yells.

"It's been a while. It's February ninth, nineteen ninety."

Both officers step back a foot and study me.

"Sir, are you sure?"

"I'm sure. I know the street life has been rough on me."

The officer scribbles this in his notes and quickly asks,  
"Do you smoke?"

"What? No sir, not in a while."

"Which brand do you smoke?"

"Sir, I don't smoke."

"Do you know who set the police car on fire last  
November?"

I want to look to the ground, but I know that would be  
unwise. I look straight into his eyes and reply, "No sir."

"Where do you currently reside?"

I know I can't tell them about the factory. I know when  
they've got a slow day, they'll be there rounding us up and  
kicking us out.

"The tunnels."

"Oh, the tunnels."

Frank, the mean cop, says, "Let's take him in, Sean."

"Do you want to do the paperwork on him? You  
remember what the captain said. Write citations for people  
who can pay. Besides, this guy is so poor, we couldn't rub  
his two ass cheeks together to squeeze out a nickel."

Then they chuckle.

"Let's go," Frank says.

Sean opens the driver's side of the door and hops in  
while Frank stomps one last time on my sandwich, twisting  
his foot back and forth over the sandwich several times.

Then he looks at me while pointing his finger at me, "I better not catch you breaking any laws."

Then he walks to the passenger side and hops in, and the police car speeds away.

I bend over and pick up my lunch, feeling completely and utterly humiliated and violated, but I must eat.

I slip the flatten sandwiches and pulverized crackers into my pocket. Then I pick up the bible and can of soda, and slip them into my other pocket and head home.

At least I didn't crack. The police think I live in the tunnels with the tunnel people. The tunnel people hobble along the sewers and drainage tunnels under the city, trying to survive as society's wastes and filth tries to drown them and erase their existence.

The sad thing about being homeless, the people name us after our abode. If we live in the sewer tunnels, then the people call us tunnel people. If we stay in tents, then we become the tent folks. If we live in RVs and campers, then they call us tent people on wheels while sleeping in cardboard boxes relegates us to the box people.

Then each abode has their peculiar type of homelessness. The drunks and drug addicts live in the boxes and sleep on park benches. The people staying in tent cities and RVs are folks down on their luck, holding onto the thin strands of civilization. Then the absolute crazies live in the sewers and tunnels under the city, and those people are the dangerous ones.

\*\*\*

After two months since I had torched the police car, the police keep harassing everyone.

Whenever I walk around downtown, I often see a squad car. My heart always races while my mouth becomes dry. My winter hat becomes damp around the forehead while a

cold sweat covers my face that the cold winter wind tries to freeze.

On February 1, I walk from the library to the Rescue Mission for my sack lunch

A police car screeches to a halt five feet in front of me. Then two police officers just stare at me as I walk by. I just lower my head and pretend I don't see them.

A week later, the skies darken early around 4 o'clock while the snow pounds the ground. I walk along a sidewalk on my way back to the factory and almost shit my pants as a spotlight blinds me.

I raise my right arm to my face to block the light.

While squinting, I see the silhouette of a police car farther up the street with two laughing shadows inside the car. I look down and continue walking along the sidewalk towards the police car while the spotlight remains on my face.

Once I pass the car, one officer says, "Should we bust him?"

"Nah," the other replies, "It's a waste of paperwork."

Afterward, I head home, and the police leave me alone.

## **Chapter 4**

Then in mid-February, the police shot an unarmed black teenager, and the community erupts into violence.

I'm not aware of this as I sit in the library, skimming through several books. Around seven, as I walk outside, I hear a large crowd screaming in unison.

My curiosity leads me to the downtown near city hall. As I turn the block, I see hundreds of people standing outside City Hall, screaming, "Justice for Marcus." As they chant, they pump their signs up and down in the air. I read several signs - *Murder is illegal - arrest the officer, Hands up - Don't shoot, and Justice for Marcus.*

Small children huddle close to their parents and hold signs, such as *My generation is next*.

Then I watch the other side and see a solid line of police officers wearing riot gear. They are standing shoulder to shoulder with a baton in one hand and a shield in the other. They march in formation like soldiers. In front of the officers, an armor plated vehicle advances towards the crowds.

I turn and return the way I had come. After making it one block, I turn around, and see the armored vehicle and police march towards the crowds.

The police fire tear gas canisters that fill the streets with white, thick smoke. Then a commotion breaks out. People start screaming. Windows are shattering. Protesters hurl firebombs and Molotov cocktails in the air. The bottles explode as they hit the ground. Other bottles strike the building facades, igniting rings of fire that try to climb the walls.

Two officers grab a protester and throw him on the ground, near the corner where I had stood. They stand over the protester, beating him with batons while kicking him on his sides.

Flashing lights and sirens from police cars, fire trucks, and ambulances fill the evening air.

I shake my head back and forth, in denial of what I had just seen. The police had declared war on the people.

The police have forgotten that respect symbolizes traffic along a two-way street. If they would treat people with respect, then the people would respect the police more, but instead they treat everyone like stray dogs they can kick around and brutalize. Then the police militarized themselves and accumulated armored vehicles and weapons to intimidate the people, utilizing force to keep everyone terrified, quiet, and in line.

Instead of heading home, I walk to the police headquarters that lies four blocks over. I figure few police

would be at the station since the police are busy with the protesters.

Walking past the new jail building, I stop to observe this six-story monstrosity. The building is a standing tower filled with tiny, narrow windows along its side like missing scales around a serpent's body. Then a chain-linked fence surrounds the property with barbwire draped along the top.

I walk to the police station – a two-story building with large tinted windows. A chain link fence surrounds the back and sides, but the front of the building lies outside the fence.

I notice a large gap between the fences between the police station and the new jail. I walk between the fences and smile when I see the back area filled with bushes and small trees. Then farther, a row of abandoned factory buildings forms a solid line behind the jail and police station – a bygone era when this city was an industrial powerhouse.

I smile after seeing where the police park their squad cars safely within the fence.

I head home and approach the old factory around nine and see Bob sitting outside waiting next to the door.

As soon as Bob sees me, he jumps out of his chair and yells, "Dude, I thought you got caught in the protests."

"No man, but it was bad. It's a war zone down there."

"I saw the news. The reporter says the protesters looted the downtown businesses and set everything on fire."

He pats me on the back, "I'm glad you made it back in one piece."

"Me too."

Then Bob picks up his miniature TV, and we both watch the screen.

The reporters show the protesters smashing window fronts and grabbing merchandise from the stores and businesses. The TV camera pans left and captures a protester throwing a firebomb at the armored vehicle.

I notice the reporter never plays the footage where the two officers are beating a protester near the street corner. The news only shows the protesters' wrongs while the police are serving their duty to protect the city.

\*\*\*

I don't believe in killing people, but I want to strike back at the bastards who killed Nathan. I decide to step up the game and send those corrupt police a message, especially after the police squashed the protests. I constantly think - how can I strike back? I scavenge for parts here and there throughout the factory.

I search the factory thoroughly. I see discarded car relays lying near a loading bay. In another part of the factory, I discover an old dusty box filled with narrow black rubber hoses.

Then one day, after getting my lunch, I return to the library. As I walk near the auto parts store, I see a small box lying on the ground. I pick up the box, open it, and remove an electric fuel pump. I slip the fuel pump into my pocket and toss the box into the trashcan in front of the store.

Then I walk to the library and pull several books off the shelves. I read books on basic electronics and physics, and I constantly think what type of device could I build?

Then I return to the factory with the fuel pump. Then I remember seeing an old car battery outside. I carry the battery to the storage room.

I take a coil of wire, cut off a foot strand. I remove the insulation from both ends. I tie one end to the battery post. Then I take another wire strand and do the same, and attach it to the other battery post.

I touch the wires to the contacts on the fuel pump, and the fuel pump whirs into life. Then I check the relays. When

I connect the wires to the first relay, I hear nothing. For the second and third relay, the relays made clicking sounds.

Every day, when I walk to the city, I always think of what kind of device could I build. In each pocket, I bring several parts.

I study in the library until dusk and walk to the police station to hide the parts behind the police station. I hide the parts in three thick bushes near a row of trees.

After two weeks, I had hidden two coils of wire, an old grill electronic igniter, two relays, the fuel pump, and a large coil of black rubber tubing, along with tools and miscellaneous parts.

On Saturday, I walk to the hardware store near downtown. As I enter the store, the clerk behind the register squints his eyes and frowns when he sees me, but he remains silent.

I notice two outdoor patio lights lying on a shelf. They are shaped like a rock, battery operated, and on sale for two for \$9.99. These lights automatically turn on when it becomes dark outside. Then I buy two different flashlights with two different brands of batteries for my new stuff.

After leaving the store, I take the stuff behind the store. I remove the packaging and deliberately scratch up the plastic on everything to make it look old. I do the same for the batteries.

I spot an old oily rag near the dumpster that someone used to wipe oil and grime off a car engine. Then I utilize the oily rag to soil the new parts.

I toss the packaging into the dumpster. Then I wipe the batteries with the rag to remove my fingerprints and insert the batteries into the patio lights and flashlights. Then I place my new parts into the bag one by one.

I return to the library and wait for the evening. Then I hide my new parts behind the police station. I smile because now I'm ready.

\*\*\*

I make my move on Sunday night, when everyone quiets down after partying on Friday and Saturday nights. I know few police patrol Sunday night as the town settles down to start the work week the next day.

I put on my thick winter coat even though it's mid-March. I head to the storage room for the red gas can filled with a flammable liquid.

I hold onto the gas can in my right hand inside my coat and walk to the downtown. About every fifteen minutes, I sit down and take a break. After reaching the city, I walk behind buildings and dumpsters to take a break.

I reach the police station and become ecstatic. Everything is quiet, and most police cars are parked behind the station in a neat row along the fence.

I walk behind the police station and hide the gas can behind a tree. Then I get my parts one by one and start putting my device together.

I cut the rubber hoses into 10-foot strands, and I plug the end with twigs from the trees and use a pin to pierce small holes at the end.

I take the grill igniter and take it apart. I tape the piezoelectric igniter to the end of the hose and connect wires to it. Then every six inches, I tape the wires securely to the rubber hose.

I don't have another igniter for the other two strands, but I plug the ends and jab small holes at the end.

I coil each rubber hose in a ring and attach each hose to a plastic splitter. Then I insert the splitter into the fuel pump. And I cut a 20-foot rubber strand and connect one side to the fuel pump and slide the other end into the gas can that I had hidden inside a bush.

A pair of headlights slices through the darkness.

I duck down and scoot near the bushes.

A police car pulls into the parking lot and parks at the end of the row of cars.

Two officers exit the car and head inside the police station.

I wait five minutes and continue building my device. I take the first patio light and break the bulb. Then I attached wires to the light bulbs' filaments and connect them to the fuel pump.

I get the other patio light and do the same. I break the light and attach wires from the filaments to the igniter.

I grab a flashlight, turn it on, and place it in my pocket.

I use a long tree branch to slide the rubber hose with the igniter through the fence and slide it under the police in the middle row. With my other hand, I hold a rag around the hose to wipe any fingerprints as the hose passes through the rag.

I slide the next black hose under the police car next to the car with the igniter hose and the last black hose under another police car on the other side.

Then I use the rag to wipe the fingerprints off the flashlights and patio lights.

I pause for several minutes. I watch the police station by turning to the left and observe the jail. Then I look behind me and hear nothing.

I take the flashlight out of my pocket, cup my hand around the bright light, wipe it clean of fingerprints, and place it against the light sensor for the patio light that triggers the fuel pump. I cover the flashlight with a thick old towel I found to block the light.

Then I place the other flashlight against the other patio light that activates the igniter. I click this one on and place another heavy towel over it. This flashlight should shine longer than the other.

I look at my device in the darkness and smile. I bend down, click on the patio lights, and use a rag to wipe my device. Then I wipe the gas can and tools, ensuring I leave no fingerprints behind. I don't need the tools anymore and I toss them into the bushes.

I feel so alive as I walk between the fences between the jail and police station.

I stop as I approach the end of the jail fence. I scan for traffic and police entering and leaving the police station. I see nothing. Everything is quiet on a Sunday night, or at least so far.

Then I walk along the sidewalk towards the downtown.

I walk towards the old fire station. I turn and look around. Although several dogs bark in the distance, not one person is walking along the street.

I slip on my gloves and pull out six tire spikes that I had made from old beach sandals three days ago. I took three beach sandals, removed the strips, cut them half, and pounded thick nails through them at different angles.

I toss the tire spikes long the dip in the driveway where the fire stations' driveway meets the road.

Then I walk home. I know I have returned late. As I approach the factory, everyone is sleeping while several people are snoring out of sync, like horny frogs croaking for female companionship around a small pond.

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I awaken late, around noon. I slip out of the sleeping bags and leave the tent.

As I rise, Bob says, "Have you heard? Someone bombed a fleet of police cars last night."

I look into Bob's eyes, "Wow! That's incredible!"

"You know, I went looking for you last night and couldn't find you." Then he twitches his head up and down

like a parent who knows the child has done something wrong and questions whether the boy will fess up and tell the truth. "You wouldn't know who done this, by chance, would ya?"

"No man. That's asking for trouble."

"The police are calling it an act of terrorism."

"Terrorism huh. Like what the police did to the protesters last month?"

"If they catch you, they may do to you like they did to Nathan."

"Perhaps that shouldn't be so bad. Could death be worse than being homeless?"

Bob just smiles and adds, "Very well then. Perhaps those bullies needed a lesson or two."

I return his smile, "Well, someone got's to be the teacher. How else can someone learn?"

The End.