

I didn't hit bottom. I hit The Bottoms.

That's what I did. I left rehab and headed straight for The Bottoms.

They call it the East Village. That made me laugh at first. I lived in Manhattan and I know the East Village. This is not the East Village. I mean, it's got that Space for Art, it's got a cool performance space, it's got cool new bars and restaurants, it's got a gritty, industrial vibe. There's a lot of new construction, but if you go far enough south and far enough east, to the very corner of downtown, right where the East Village hits Barrio Logan on the south and Golden Hill on the east, where Vinnie's is (St. Vincent de Paul's), and the Neil Good Day Center, and the Alpha Project Tent – that's San Diego's skid row, it's the heart of darkness, it's where homeless people go to shoot up right on the street, out in the open, it's where everything goes down, where whatever you're looking for, black, or white, or rock, or powder, or roxies, or blues, or e, or china white that's not really china white really it's fentanyl, you can find it, right there, on the street, but not for strangers, you get hurt asking for shit like that people you don't know don't know you, if you do know, then you know where to go. It's not dirty there, it's grimy. But for people like me, it's the place to go.

Homeless, sure. But place matters.

There's downtown, where most of the homeless stay. But there are different parts. There's the west side of downtown, closer to Broadway and Horton Plaza, there's the homeless people who stay downtown near City College, and the ones who stay in Balboa Park — a lot of them don't like people, don't like interacting, don't like thinking they always gotta watch their back, they like the park cuz they can get to the stuff they need, it's right there, to score or come up or trade or sell, but they don't stay with the rest of us, they stay in the park, they keep apart.

The Food Stamp office, the Health and Human Services Agency's Family Resource Center is at the MTS Building at 12th and Imperial, you can apply for food stamps there, but not for General Relief, to get GR, you have to go to the HHSA FRC at 10th and C, which, technically is probably part of the East Village, the East Village kind of starts around 10th, or maybe 8th or 9th, but 10th is kind of the East Village, but really, that far north, by Broadway, it's more like City College, or pretty close, and it's also the southern edge of Balboa Park, so you get those cats, too, the ones from the park and the ones who stay by the college, it's kind of a crossroads between the west side over by Horton Plaza, the East Village, and City College and Balboa Park, and even the highways all cross right there, the 5 and the 163 and 94 all kind of pass and cross and intersect and exit all right around there.

And then there's The Bottoms, not the entire East Village, just a corner of it, weird sort of square, or maybe it's a rhomboid, in the southeast corner of downtown, right on the edge of Barrio Logan on the south and Golden Hill on the west. Starting from the library, go east on K street all the way down to 17th, you'll pass a big Ace Parking lot on your right, and a whole lot of new buildings just done or almost done, and then the MTS Yard where all the buses pull in every night and pull out every morning, and then at 16th and K there's the little tiny liquor store, and you walk up the hill, Crack Alley, on K between 16th and 17th, and K dead ends onto 17th street. Turn right, and head south down toward Imperial, you'll pass Neil Good Day Center on the left, and the clearing above one of the highways, the 5 I think, maybe right where the 15 runs into it, behind Neil Good where a bunch of cats post up and get high, and then the big parking lot that used to be an empty lot that used to be a great spot but now you gotta go on the other side of it, and run across the highway, and there's the Alpha Project tent there, now, too, right at the corner of 17th and Imperial. Turn right on Imperial, but if you walk a block more, you hit Commercial, and it's bumping on Commercial, or at least it used to be, and it sometimes still is, especially for the old-timers who still walk around thinking the block is the same as it used to be before the area got hot and

savage with cops. But if you walk down Imperial, walking west toward 12th, you pass on the left Saint Vincent de Paul's Father Joe's Villages, two or three blocks of a complex of homeless shelters, low-income and transitional housing, and services for the homeless, and on the right, the MTS Yard. When you walk by Vinnies courtyard there'll be lots of cats posted up in there, lot of 'em homeless, a lot of 'em in the shelter or in one of the programs, but buying a little, or slinging some, people got stuff spread out on the street, stuff they stole or came up on or found, clothes, maybe, theirs, the stuff they brought to San Diego when they came here from out of town, or what they had in their duffel bag, but it's too much to carry and they need the cash so they're gonna sell those jeans they love, or that jacket their sister got for 'em, it's nice, real leather, but you can't shoot up leather, but the 20 buck or maybe 10 you get for you can, or maybe they raided a donation bin for a thrift store, grimy motherfuckers trying to make a buck offa clothes they stole from a charity, and you pass people selling 5 dollar packs of smokes, you pass people drunk or high or psychotic or mad or all that, maybe someone's got something good they wanna sell or trade, a brand new cell phone charger, or an Obamaphone that works, sell it for 10 bucks, people walking down the street talking to themselves or asking you for something, or yelling at somebody but it's not a real person, past people slinging dope, past the two big Ace Parking lots, two or three folding tables set up, one at this corner, one down the street, one across the street, all giving out Obamaphones if you have ID and proof you get benefits, you pass your homie, ghost-riding a bike, huge grin on his face, can't stop, he's looking for Shadow or Louisiana or someone who'll hook him up fat for a bike, and you pass the Greyhound station, and then you're at the 12th and Imperial Trolley, you can catch all three lines there, the Green or Orange out to East County, or the Blue line down south, all the way to TJ if you want, and the little trolley shop the Arabs run, they're cool to talk to to but shystie as fuck, they buy merch but they lowball like a motherfucker, especially if you're hurting, if you walk in dope sick, dirty, with that one piece of merchandise that they said they'd pay 30 for, 30 bucks for a pair of brand new

women's size 8 Ugg boots for dude's wife, or Chanel cologne for 25 bucks but it's like 80 or 90 in the store, but they look at you and know you're desperate, they say they don't want it, say come back tomorrow, even though they told you they wanted it, told you what they'd pay, and you went out and got it and you were counting on that 20 or 25 , and now you're hurting and you can't wait till tomorrow, so you say can you help me out here? and I got exactly what you wanted, and they'll make a show of pulling out their wallets and say I only got 5 bucks on me. Bullshit, 5 bucks. They got a whole register of cash, and when they want, they reach in for it, but you're just a worthless homeless junkie, never mind that you got a brand new \$125.00 Adidas jacket, or a \$300.00 Michael Kors bag, or a pair of brand new size 11 Air Jordan's, price tag still on all your shit, so they know it's new, they can see what it'd cost 'em at Macy's or Nordstrom's or Dick's Sporting Goods but they won't pay a fair price, they won't even pay you what they promised. If you're lucky, they'll only lowball you a little. And if you're hurting and desperate, they'll give you bullshit, 5 bucks or 10, and it's not enough, not for the risk you took or the time, but you need that money and you don't know how long it'll take to find someone down here, down at The Bottoms, down on the block, who'll pay you what it's worth, but with a few bucks in your hand, you'll have some shit and a needle real fast, right there, the perfect spot to get dope, so you say yes, you take that 5 or maybe 10, ask 'em to throw in a sandwich or a soda and they say they will so you don't feel like you got totally raped even though you did.

From the trolley station at 12th and Imperial, walk up the hill, up 12th, but it's really Park, walk along the trolley tracks, past the new condos and apartments that were just completed right when the pandemic hit, the big Ace Parking lot across the street, folks used to camp all around it, but the cops got people out of there at 5 or 6am, and now they don't even let people stay overnight – a few, maybe, but not a whole block of tents and blankets and people spread out down the street, not anymore, not with all these rich folks moving in – and you walk up a couple blocks and you're back at the library, where, before the pandemic, people posted up in there, taking naps until a

guard woke you up, but I think they prefer you quiet to making a ruckus or arguing with 'em, people clustered around outlets, charging phones and portable chargers and tablets and cordless razors and anything else they have, and using the free wifi, or at the public computers on the second and third floors, and on the stairwells, sitting behind the elevator shaft, smoking a bowl or buying a dub, or in one of the bathrooms bird-bathing, or shooting up, or jacking off, or around the outside of the building, bumming a smoke, or looking for their homie so they can go out and do a lick, or for their girl, they got into a fight last night and now he's trying to find her, *she's got my charger or I need my phone.*

To me, that square-maybe-rhomboid is The Bottoms. To other people, it's just 16th and 17th Street between K and Imperial, but most people down there, they call that The Block – you know where Chicago Joe is? Yeah, he's on The Block. or He's in front of Neil Good, or He's at Vinnies courtyard, or He's on Commercial.

Imperial and Commercial, between the 12th and Imperial Trolley and 17th Street, The Block, the two Ace Parking Lots and all the people posted up in them or around them.

The Bottoms.

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I had a dream, or maybe I should say I have a memory, or maybe I should say that this is what I remember, but whatever it was, dream or memory or just something I remember, it was clear till I tried to write it down, and I think, if I can just remember how it started the rest will come out, but how did it start? and how does it end? and when I start asking those questions everything is gone and I can't remember what it is I wanted to write – the memory? my life? or maybe just my dreams?

Tell the story about Keith, about boosting with him, admiring him, he was cool, and he was good at boosting, a lot of confidence and a whole lot of style points, and he always treated me decent.

Tell the story about the night LA tried to sell me the promise of messing around with Keith, how when she needed money for a re-up, she could get scandalous. She did what she had to do, and she would not be stopped. There's a reason she was queen of The Bottoms.

Tell the story about the night Keith and I mobbed around and I told him that story about how LA tried to sell him to me, and he laughed and said "you know that's not gonna happen, right?" and I laughed and nodded, "Yeah, I know" but how I wished it would.

Tell the story about LA, how she was my first connect downtown, how she would front me, which out there was gold, how she was the reason people fucked with me at all, at least at first, how she didn't stand on a corner slinging dope, she had guys working for her, a bunch of guys, all over downtown. She put people on deck. She got people set up. Tell the story of how she hooked up with another dealer, Tosh, and the two of them, they ran shit, till Tosh got arrested and LA got pregnant and how they both went to treatment and how they had a baby and she has a job now and I heard she came back with the baby to show her off and say hi to people still on The Block.

Tell the story about how a bunch of us were doing goofballs at Big Chris's and my tent, him and me and what's his name, and Yuma and Keith, and shooting goofballs and it hits me hard and I throw up and Keith says you don't really do goofballs, and I say naw, just mostly speed,

but sometimes I'll throw in, cuz that's what it's been, a bunch of guys throwing in the dope they have and drawing up shots and to be social, I throw in, and to be honest, I'm the guy who usually has the most speed, and Keith says yeah, that was me, too. I didn't do black at all till I started throwing in on goofballs, and then one day I woke up sick. It's been downhill from there. He didn't say it to warn me. It was just conversation. Like literally everyone, every single person I know does black, does goofballs. I am literally the only guy out there who only does white, at least in The Bottoms, at least among my circle of friends. But I decide right then, no more black, no more goofballs, and it's not a hard decision to make, cuz I was just throwing up and I still feel woozy and nauseous and I can't say I even really like the high. I'm cool with speed and that sick, sick rush I get from slamming a fat shot.

Tell the story of how I looked around and saw all my friends, everyone I know, strung out and dope sick, how they'd do anything for black, straight dope fiend behavior, how I don't know much about the streets but I know I don't wanna do that, don't wanna be that, but how I know how to cook, I throw in with 'em, but don't draw up with 'em, cuz I hate goofballs, and I don't wanna get hooked. But then again, I think, there's my exit strategy. There's my out, if I ever need one. I'll do this till I run the wheels off, and then, when I can't do it anymore, I'll just score some black and shoot a fat shot and leave it at that.

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I don't wanna get hooked on black, but it's nice to have options.

Tell the story about Ben, and how he talked me into doing black even though I told him I don't like it, and how I definitely don't wanna get hooked on it, get all strung out, but Ben can talk me into anything, I'd do anything I can for him, and he knows it, and he uses it, and he uses me and I know that, but it's OK, and he fixed me up a shot of black, kept saying you'll love it, and how it was like falling asleep, but more like falling into a deep hole, how like a candle is flickering and then it just kinda getting blown out, but not fast, but slow, and at the same time, all of a sudden, and then Ben's hitting me, not light little slaps, he's punching me in the head and chest, punching me, screaming in my face, Wake Up! WAKE UP!

Tell the story about wondering if that's what it feels like to die. There wasn't a bright light, and no floating above everything looking down and watching, and no pictures or memories flashing through my mind. Just eyes open, eyes shut, like falling into a hole, but easy, no fear, like a candle being blown out, all of a sudden and really slow at the same time.

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I find myself repeating the same stories over and over and over again.

When I was a kid, my favorite game was Runaway.

When I was a kid, I played a lot by myself. I was an only child, and I didn't really play with the kids on the block, so I played with my friends from TV shows, Colonel Hogan, or Samantha Stevens, or the Bradys. Peter was my best friend. In the TV room, I'd jump on the couch and hide under the coffee table, and pretend I was on TV, on those shows, in them, more like, living in them, like the time Mrs. Stevens gave me magic powers but we had to keep it a secret from Mr. Stevens cuz he didn't like magic, or when me and Peter played a trick on Greg and hid from him when he was supposed to be watching us. He thought we disappeared, and then he had to lie to Alice and his folks! And then we showed up and made him look stupid, and it was really, really funny!

I didn't play with the kids on the block, and I didn't play with the kids at school, either. But sometimes, I'd play with kids who came over to our house with their folks, kids like Anthony and Denise, they were brother and sister, and Denise was like a year younger than me, and Anthony was like three years younger, and their dad was in the Air Force like my dad, and my mom was Japanese and their mom was Chinese or Taiwanese and whenever they came over we played Runaway.

We were a band of children making our way in a new place, no adults, no home, no one to help us but us, so we had to figure out how to make it, and learn how to trust each other, to come through, to help each other survive. We might be in a jungle, or on a tropical island, or sometimes, an alien planet. It might be on a tropical island like *Gilligan's Island*, or in a strange, primitive jungle like *Land of the Lost*, and we had all kinds of adventures. We were lost and scared with nowhere to go and then we helped each other, and we made our home and created a place where we really belonged.

That's what being homeless is like at first. It's a big adventure. New friends, like John from Las Vegas who wound up on the streets downtown at about the same time I did. Neither of us knew anybody so we palled around, looked for each other when we were alone, looked out for each other when we were together. We pilfered food from restaurants and grocery stores, we stole batteries and portable chargers from the Wal-Mart Neighborhood Market, and the Ross downtown, stuff from 7-11, Albertson's, Ralph's. T-shirts, jeans, earbuds, flashlights, bicycle lights. He traded a bunch of stuff and got us a tent. We always managed to get food and get dope and we kept each other high. He'd never been to San Diego before. I'd never lived on the streets. We helped each other figure shit out. I wasn't alone. I had a friend. That's what being homeless was like. At first.

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Pitching tents, camping outdoors in Balboa Park, or in the grassy, woodsy areas by the highway onramps and overpasses.

Riding (stolen) bikes fast down Broadway at 3 in the morning, slight mist in the air, cold air whipping against your face and through your hair.

Playing cops and robbers at real stores, running from mall security, hiding from real cops.

Being one of the guys, just mobbing around, seeing what there is to get into, finding out if anyone has a lick or a way to come up.

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on page)

Adapt or perish. Nature's inevitable
demand.

– H.G. Wells

Here is what I thought were the rules:

Homeless don't steal from homeless. Period.

Unless you're stealing your shit back. Unless you're stealing from the dude who jacked you. That includes his friends. They might've helped. That includes if you just think it might've been the guy, or if he's got a backpack that kinda looks like the one that got jacked, or if he's got a backpack and you don't.

If you promise to watch something, it's on you if it gets jacked or you lose it. You owe for it.

You don't know anyone's name. You don't know where anyone is. You never know anything about what anyone is asking about.

The days, the places, all blur together, nothing to make them memorable, nothing to distinguish one from another, except when something happens, like that time I ran into Charlie while he was at work, at Nordstrom's I think, or Macy's, no, Nordstrom's, or like getting hit by a car that didn't see me in the crosswalk or the light he was about to run if not for the barrier made by my body loaded down with stuff but trying to get more, one day just like another, different stores, different stuff, same thing every day, except when something happens like getting arrested or hit by a car or embarrassed to run into a friend from rehab.

I was at work, too, when I ran into Charlie, that's what I thought of it, work, getting ready, showing up, putting in time and making the effort and doing my best at it every single day, boosting, stealing, shoplifting, call it what you want, I called it work, and I thought of as work, and even survival, going out hunting or foraging like humans have been doing since time began, gathering things to bring back home, to use or to trade to survive and to sell on the streets, the black market economy of the streets, thinking as I do of the long line of people who did this before, every place and every time, people who come to a new place and find a way to find what they need and then trade it and sell it to survive, to make a life, to make a place for themselves and their way in the world of the streets of the places where we just arrived.

And then you learn what the street rules really are.

If you take something and nobody stops you, it's yours.

Finders keepers. You leave something behind, or hide it and it gets found, it's fair game. You wanna hold onto it, then hold onto it.

It's never about right and wrong. It's about who has the balls and who has the muscle and what're you willing to do? How far you willing to go? It's about taking what you want, what you can, and if you can, then it's what you deserve, you earned it.

If someone takes from you, stop 'em, get it back, or make 'em pay. You either let people people know, or they fuck with you.

It's not what happened that matters. It's what people think happened. It's the stories that get told about what happened that matters. Leon might be a bully and a thug and a thief but the story is he collects his debts and nobody plays him for a fool, so he's a tough guy, not a grimy, scandalous motherfucker. Which he is.

The only thing people understand is strength. Strength is what you're willing to do.

Homeless steal from homeless all the time. It's only wrong when it's your stuff that got jacked.

That crap about watching something, and if it gets jacked, you owe for it? That's a load of crap. You wanna get rid of some shit tent you can't sell or some bike that ain't even worth 10 bucks, ask some new kid to watch it, and then dip, go do your thing, and the next time you see him, tell him he owes you, tell him you were gonna sell it, tell him you had a buyer, tell him you came back 10 minutes later and Where the fuck were you? and I waited for like an hour, I walked around the block, I thought you just took my bike.

You wanna keep something safe, you don't give it to some cat you just met in line for the shower to hold while you run over to Neil Good. You hold onto it, or give it to a homie you trust, but good luck with that, finding a homeless homie you can trust. Scandalous, shystie motherfuckers.

Tell the story of when Leon walked up to Boyd in the middle of the street and took all his black from him, his backpack, his phone, yelling you owe me 20 bucks! Leon's a lying piece of shit, and I doubt Boyd owed him anything, and anyway, what he got was worth way more than 20 bucks. Boyd didn't stop him, didn't do anything, so now, Boyd owes him 20 bucks, and Leon did the right thing.

Tell the story of LA, mad about the EBT card I wouldn't let her sell, making it out like I owed her, how I did the math and told her I only owed her 40, but since I didn't have 40, she took the bluetooth shit and the cologne that I had on me and said "that's tax" and "see these guys here? One word from me and they'll fuck you up." How after she walked away, Tosh walked over and handed me a sack, like a tenner, like 30 bucks of dope. He got mad when I thanked him, cuz he didn't want anyone to know he did that in case word got back to LA. "You trying to get me into trouble?"

At the the Tinfish trolley, I see a thin, wiry homeless dude, muscles and veins and no body fat, not developed muscles, just his intramuscular wall visible at his skin, no shirt, waving a piece of rebar, swinging it like a baseball bat, other homeless folks backing up from him, some running, some trying to talk to him, I'm a few hundred feet away, walking toward there, walking toward Tinfish, toward the public bathroom, smelly nasty grimy place, but I'm walking and watching this guy with the rebar move fast to this one guy and swings the rebar like a bat cracking it solid on this guy's head and in my memory I think I saw blood squirt out, and bits of skin and bone and gray matter splatter off him, but I'm like half a block away, I'm walking but I stop when I see that so I can't see blood splatter or any splatter but in my head I see it plain as day, he takes a crack then takes another one, then runs off, swinging the rebar, running off, people scattering away, and I don't know what the fuck I'm supposed to do. And my friend Chris (not Big Chris, but redheaded Chris, big solid guy from Kansas, used to be a butcher he says, bike thief now, always talking about the killer bike he got yesterday, worth a fuck-ton of money, but I never see him with anything today, not ever money, not ever dope), he's running toward me, running away from the guy with the rebar, he passes me and sees me and says Motherfucker's crazy! so turn and hurry after him to find out what's going on.

There's a code on the street. A rule. Never call 911. Never call the cops. Sometimes you can call an ambulance, but people gotta know, and who you're calling for's gotta know, has to ask you to do it, has to say it's OK, if they can, if they're able, if they're awake enough and aware, but everyone else around, you gotta say "I'm calling 911" or something, cuz then sirens and flashing lights pull up and nobody wants to be surprised, and cops ride along, they say they don't, not for OD calls, but they do, sometimes they do, and you never call the cops on purpose, not for anything, don't matter what you see of what went down, if you wanna get involved, do something, make someone stop doing something you think's wrong, that's on you, go ahead, but don't call the cops, don't nobody call the cops, pussies call cops, pussies and fags, it's a pussy move, a bitch move, and snitches get stitches, and bitches too, if they call the cops.

Except they don't. Bitches call the cops on their dudes a lot. I know a lot of girls, they'll call the cops in an argument, they use it like a weapon, they know their man has a warrant or is strapped or holding and is gonna get busted so don't get a girl like that mad cuz she will drop a dime, and if you go back to her and give her a reason she will do it again.

And a lot of guys I know have a DV charge, but none of them ever really hit their chick. She hit them, and they just were trying to get her to stop, or she was throwing things at them and they were just trying to hold her so she couldn't do anything, or she was coming at 'em with a knife and he kicked it out of her hand, and if the cops get called then someone's gonna end up in handcuffs and everyone knows it's always the guys, and it don't matter if she hit me, or if I didn't do nothing, or you can show them where she bit you in the arm or threw your cell phone into the road, and when my homie says that his girl got him arrested again, I always have the same question. "Again?" like "how many times does this happen?" like "when she gets you arrested, how is that not the only time?" like "how do you go back to a bitch you know calls the cops when she's mad" and I have the same question for the girls who say "that motherfucker hit me again," I say "again?" like "how does this happen

more than once” like “when someone shows you their true colors, believe them the first time.”

and yeah, I know a lot of these girls and yeah, a lot of ‘em are crazy, except sometimes, they do have a black eye, and, sometimes, my homie is a piece of shit who will hit a girl but then turn around and say he’d never do that, guys who hit girls deserve a beat down, he’d never lay hands on a girl, but his girl has a black eye and won’t talk about it, they just cling to each other, like they’re all they have, they’re all they’ll ever have.

In LA's tent, LA & Tosh, and a couple of their homies, guys they put on deck, guys who owe them, their crew, their posse, but for real, it's their crew, these guys work for 'em. They ran the streets, back in the day, not solo, not just them, and maybe not for all that long, but there was a time when everybody knew LA and everybody knew Tosh and everybody wanted to be their friend, and lots of motherfuckers wanted something from 'em.

I just bought a ball, just barely became homeless, like I didn't know I was homeless yet, I bought from LA before, came to her tent, hers and Tosh's, mobbed around the bottoms high as fuck, even hooked up with a fool once in a while, cuz I had dope and sometimes and I had cash, or I used to have cash, before I lost my job, before I wound up on the streets. But that's my point, I was homeless, but didn't realize it yet, or I knew it but it didn't sink in, not like it would, not like later when it would just hit me, I don't have any place to go. This is where I am, this is the only place I can be.

In LA's tent, LA & Tosh's, just bought a ball, and just barely became homeless, no place to go, at least, no place indoors, but I'm high as fuck and this doesn't bother me. On Commercial, on the block between 16th and 17th, the block right behind Vinnie's, in the big tent LA and Tosh have, like an 8-man or even bigger, and they got it set up like, like you walk through a covered tarp area to get to the opening into the tent, like it's two rooms, and in the main room, it's cut in half, a living room with something like a couch in there and milkcrates turned upside down that's like a coffee table, and a bedroom area with an air mattress, and they got candles and lamps they covered with T-shirts, so it's got a reddish glow inside, and I just bought a ball, and I'm cool with LA and she thinks of me as a good customer, someone who always pays cash, always has the right amount, always at least a ball, and always full price, not angling for a trade or a deal or a front or coming in with change, or a few dollars short, asking for a nickel. But that's cuz she's not really clear that I'm on the streets now either, and she's cool that I'm kicking it there, and so Tosh is

cool, too, and the other cats hanging there, don't matter what they think, cuz this is LA's spot, LA and Tosh's, and if they're cool with me, I'm good on the streets.

The tent is against a fence, chain link, that goes all the way down the block, actually down two blocks, it's a big lot, a full block or maybe two blocks square, surrounded by a fence, a tall chain link fence with green tarp hanging from it so you can't see inside, it's a big yard, like it's near the trolley station and the MTS buildings so the bus yard is close by, and the trolley yard is close by and there are tow truck yards close by and other yards with lumber and machinery stacked inside, so I don't know what this yard is for, but it's a big lot and a big yard and LA and Tosh have their huge tent set up right onto the side of the fence.

And I'm sitting on that sofa thing, whatever it is they have set up like a sofa, and LA and Tosh are on their air mattress, LA sprawled out, Tosh sitting up, bullshitting with one of his homies, no shirt, sheen of sweat or oil on his skin, kinda glowing in the light, sexy as fuck, but I try to be cool, try not to look, and I did a fat shot and I'm chopping it up, or really, just listening while they all chop it up, and then I hear voices, like right next to us, like there's people right on the other side of the fence, and I'm tripping and LA sees me and laughs and says That's King, King stays over there, "KING! YO! Keep it down!" but King doesn't respond, doesn't seem to hear her, cuz King is busy talking to his girl, yelling at her, really, some black dude yelling at some white chick, his girl, and she's yelling back, and real fast it heats up and it's yelling and name-calling and "fucking asshole" and "stupid bitch" and it's a knock down drag out, screaming and things thrown or knocked onto the ground and a small dog yapping and yipping, and "Where the FUCK have you been all day?" and "I'm sick, motherfucker, you know that I'm SICK!!" and "Lazy ass bitch" and "Place is a fucking mess" and "You don't do nothin' to contribute" and "I been waiting for you all fucking day, ALL FUCKING DAY!" and "Did you fuck her, too, you motherfucking piece of shit?" and "you been laying in that same damn spot all fucking day, just expect me to go out and do

everything, hustle my ass off making money and you sit here like a goddamn queen and I bring back money and I gotta bring back dope and I gotta bring back food and what do you do, just sit here wait for me and bitch about it like you don't got it easy, like any bitch in the world wants it like this and maybe they'd appreciate it" and "you don't bring nothing, you don't even gimme pussy no more" and the dog is yipping and then yelps and "don't you fucking hurt my dog" and "shut that fucking dog up!" and **SMACK!** and angry and stunned and mean "you ASSHOLE you MOTHERFUCKER" and SMACK and "Shut up!" and **SMACK!** "Shut the FUCK UP!" and then crying and "Stop! You asshole! you're a piece of shit" and **SMACK!** "I said shut up" and "Don't open you motherfucking mouth" and **SMACK!** and **SMACK!** and he's just whaling on her, just taking off, beating the shit out of her, sobbing, and begging, and crying, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! and it's just cries and whimpers and then really soft "I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm so sorry"

"You think you're some kinda queen, you think I work for you? You got it good, lots of bitches treat me a lot better to get what you get" and "this place is a motherfucking mess, dog shit everywhere, you can't even clean up, can't even take the dog for a walk" and "You gotta start contributing, you gotta bring money in or something, some kinda way. You gotta hustle, turn some tricks, do SOMETHING!" and crying, just crying, just crying, him saying "Do SOMETHING!"

I'm sitting on the soft lumpy thing that's kinda like a sofa and LA is sitting up and Tosh is sitting up and I'm staring at a candle, and nobody's talking and nobody's doing anything and I think I should make him stop, and I think, I should call 911, and I'm sitting there, high as fuck, staring at a candle, listening to a girl sobbing, face pressed against her dog, "you gotta do SOMETHING" sitting there, still, not saying anything till pretty soon it's just the sound of a girl crying.

Big Chris almost died once.

He's alive. I'm not sure where he is right now, but the last time I ran into Amanda, his girlfriend, he was in jail, in Bailey, she said, but catching a chain. Gonna have to do time upstate someplace. But he almost died, this was like a couple years ago, at the campsite we used to share, but I wasn't there cuz I was in jail, sold dope to an undercover, stupid, and I didn't even know about it till after I got out. Youngster was on a sick one. I hate Youngster, he's angry and crazy and always on a sick one, refuses to sleep except when he falls out but he does fat shot after fat shot and is a violent scandalous scary motherfucker who stays fucked up, stays awake, not for days, but for weeks, is psychotic as fuck, hallucinating, seeing shit, hearing things, paranoid, violent, always trying to fuck someone up cuz he knows for sure who's trying to jack him or who's trying to kill him or who's talking shit behind his back or wants to get him arrested, he's paranoid as fuck, aggro as hell, and Chris was at his tent, posted up in the wooded area over by City College right at the offramp to the 5 where Chris had a tent, and Youngster comes up with a knife, and Chris is called Big Chris, but really, he's huge, he's a monster, a beast, nobody fucks with him, especially not scrawny little dumbfucks like Youngster unless they wanna get their ass handed to 'em, but he runs up with a knife, screaming and slashing, and Chris showed me the scars from the defensive wounds when he told me this story, nasty and gnarly, Youngster slashing and stabbing and punching and puncturing till Chris was down, bleeding bad, cuts deep, cuts everywhere, slashes and stab wounds, hands and arms and torso and neck and face and blood's everywhere, and it's pouring out, like an artery's cut, like maybe more than one, everyone's freaked, people are trying to wrap the cuts, make tourniquets, do something, with their dirty ass T-shirts or some filthy rag they grabbed from their bag and Youngster is jumping up and down, giddy, elated "I killed someone! I killed someone" and nobody will call 911 cuz they're afraid the cops will come, and nobody wants the cops to come, and Youngster's jumping up and down, whooping like he won something, and then Keith walks up, no idea what's going on, just coming by to post up and get high cuz it's morning and it's a chill spot and Chris is bleeding bad, bleeding

out, and he says “What the fuck!” and calls 911, not even thinking, like it’s the right thing to do, like a normal person would do, but nobody’s normal, and Keith is Chris’s only real friend right at that moment, but later everyone acts like they’re Chris’s best friend and did something besides freak out and press a nasty dirty rag on a cut, and an ambulance comes and the cops show up too and everyone dips, all the homies, Youngster too, except Keith cuz he’s not a totally burnt out total idiot and he wants to make sure Chris is OK and he wants to make sure we know where he’s going, and the cops question him after and run his ID and he has a warrant for failure to appear for some stupid petty theft shoplifting charge and so even though Keith was the only person who did the right thing and even though Chris woulda died there, bled out by the highway onramp by City College, Keith gets arrested for being the only decent human being on the scene and Youngster keeps mobbing around talking crazy downtown like he’s a big shot cuz he took a motherfucker down.

The only thing that makes life possible is permanent, intolerable uncertainty, not knowing what comes next.

– Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*

(centered with wide margins, about 3.5 inches. Makes a column of text about 2 inches wide)

Get a job?

I had a job.

I don't have a resume. I don't have a phone. I don't have an address. Should I put "homeless" on the job application? Should I say "I'll just stop by and check" where it asks for a phone number to reach me? Should I ask, "got anything to eat?" to the guy at the Starbucks where I dropped off my application?

Go to a shelter?

Wow! Thanks! What a great idea! Why didn't I think of that?

So it's that easy, huh? You just go there, to a shelter, and they have lots of room, and they're just sitting there waiting for people like me to come in, and they just welcome us in and give us a safe and clean place to stay, and nobody at a shelter will jack you, and nobody not on their meds is sleeping right next to you and screams and talks and argues to voices all night long, and nobody has lice or bed bugs or smells so foul and you can't leave your shit alone not even to shower and oh, by the way, did you know the shower is filthy, and some guys wear shoes in there cuz they don't have sandals and they don't want whatever disgusting bacteria is growing on the slick, dirty tile with god knows how many nasty homeless dudes feet on it for how many hours and how many days and how many years.

But yeah, I'll go to a shelter. How do I get in? Who do I call?

Social Services. Oh! SOCIAL SERVICES. Yeah, that big social services building, that place you go and you say I'm homeless and boom, here you go, here's a place to stay, it's just like that, it's just that easy. And where is this wonderful spot, this magic door that has every solution to every problem and the only reason people are on the streets is cuz we haven't gone to Social Services. You know, they should tell us that. I mean, I woulda gone if I knew where to go. Where is this place, the answer to all my problems? What number should I call?

Stupid piece of shit. Judgmental fuck.

Go home and eat your dinner.

And Raphael was into benzos, Xanax, Zani-bars, or bars, that was his thing, goofballs and bars, and he lost everything in New York, and out here he runs Wood, just a standard issue white boy out here, but for some reason I think he might be Puerto Rican or even Dominican, I mean Raphael? What kinda white boy name is that? Gotta be something, I think he said once Puerto Rican, but maybe it was Dominican, except all the other Dominican's I knew in New York were black, but that's racist, so I don't know. I know he doesn't speak Spanish, cuz that's another thing he hates about San Diego, that people think you should know Spanish, but I don't know, maybe I made that up about him being Puerto Rican, I can't remember for sure, but he lost everything in New York, cuz I guess you get to that place eventually, where you literally don't have anything, and nowhere to turn and no one to help you, so he came out here, to Cali, to San Diego, cuz it's brutal back there, that's what he said, it's brutal, those streets, outdoors, it's brutal and it's cold, and winter is No Joke! Motherfuckers die out there! And that's what happens to Raphael, right here, in San Diego, in The Bottoms or maybe it was in Barrio Logan, maybe even on the overpass, that was his spot, and when I heard he died, I thought he overdosed, cuz that's what he said all the time, I just wanna die, I wish I was dead, I'm just gonna OD, and I'd say Don't say that, and Not near me, I'll narkan your ass, and You always say that, Raphael, but c'mon, it's just the withdrawal and you're sick and you always come up and then you feel better, except one night in winter, it was raining, and he nodded out, passed out, like always, like every day, but it wasn't an OD, it was wet and drizzly and it was cold and he was so barred out the cold didn't wake him, he just stayed passed out in the cold and the wet on the ground with no tarp or no blanket, getting colder and colder, and this motherfucker, who came all the way to Cali cuz winters in New York were brutal and a motherfucker could die of exposure out there, dies on the streets of San Diego of motherfucking exposure, and that is straight fucked up, that is total and complete bullshit, that is the most fucked up thing ever in the world.

I'm walking up Park, passing the library, walking from 12th and Imperial to Park and Market, seeing who's out and seeing what's up figuring out what to do to come up today and see Big Chris barreling down K street and he sees me and hollers and heads right to me, he's pissed and there's tears in his eyes, and I hand him a smoke and he says "My wife just came by" she lives in North Park with their two daughters, they met in AA, he was sober for six years, and was an electrician and they lived in North Park in a little in-law unit behind a house, him and his wife and his girls, who still live there without him, for the past four years, just his wife and his daughters, she's a midwife, I think, or paralegal or something, but she came by in their car looking for Chris and she spotted him and she stopped and jumped out with the girls, and Chris is upset, "What was she trying to do?" and he's pissed, his daughters seeing him like that, on the street dirty, and honestly, knowing Chris, probably shooting up behind a car, or nodded out with a needle still stuck in his arm, or standing with a cigarette dangling from his mouth, noodle grooving, looking dirty, looking homeless as fuck, but he's alert now, and mad and really upset "Your daughters want to see their FATHER! What the fuck!?! What does she expect me to do!?" and he's pissed and there's tears in his eyes and he's my friend and I have no idea how to help but I think we should prolly go and get high.

I don't know what to say, so I say "that sucks" and I say "that's really fucked up" and I say "that was a really fucked up thing for her to do" and I think *God that lady's at the end of her rope* and I think *those poor little girls* and I see my friend standing in front of me, pissed and torn to shreds, and I imagine the scene, Chris sitting on the sidewalk nodded out, maybe a point still in his arm, his wife coming at him, yelling his name, each hand yanking a girl down a street in The Bottoms, Chris nodded out but waking up fast when he sees what's coming at him, his wife storming right to him, his little girls in tow.

I don't know what to say, so I say "do you wanna go work with me," boosting, and he says "yeah, let's do it" and "do you have anything?" meaning dope and I don't and I want some too so we head back down K street toward Neil Good cuz we know we can score and get high and go out and come up and come back and get high.

That's how we bonded, back when we first met, on 16th street, posted up behind one of those big green electrical boxes, shielded from the street, I had some dope and no point and he had a rig and no shit so we swapped and helped each other out, and we're fixing up our shots, he goes first, and then while I'm getting ready he says You new around here? and I say I just got here, a couple weeks or a month, and I tell him I left rehab, and I tell him I'm from North Park but really my place is in City Heights, but I still think of North Park as my neighborhood even though I'm on the streets at the moment, on the streets downtown, and I ask him how long he's been out here and he thinks about it and says Shit, it's like four years. My daughter just turned four. And he tells me he was sober in AA for six years and I was, too, so we bond over that and talk about relapse while we fix up our shots, he relapsed right after his daughter was born, say it's weird how that happens, I was out here one night getting high and then I'm still here the next day, and one day just turns into the next and it's been a month, and the next thing you know it's been a year, and then you realize you been out here four years, and I nod, and wonder has it been two weeks or four? and I draw up my shot and ask him to stand point so I can shoot up.

So that's what I do. That's what a homie does for a homie. Something really fucked up just happened. Let's go and get high.

(centered in 2 inch column)

Except for a lucky few, everyone is from someplace, but that someplace, it turns out, is gone.

–Chang-Rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*

... he wished this particular memory had chosen another moment to surface.

–Pat Barker, *The Ghost Road*

In my defense, I could have dispensed with the truth entirely and told a much better story.

–Patrick Rothfuss, *The Wise Man's Fear*

(same 2-inch centered column formatting, with specific line breaks – refer to original scan)

Drugs allowed him to adopt a persona

everything

about that life different from this one, and this is what he thought of as his real life

all behind him now, gone. It's not like

But who knows anymore what's real? Not him. Not anymore. He may think he's got a hold
on reality, but it's questionable, and

The only real question
is why?

(centered vertically and horizontally, 2 inch column)

The memories won't leave so he writes them down to make them stay, but he finds himself repeating the same stories over and over and over again.