

Homeless

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There are several more around me. Just like me. Homeless.

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Every night, I lay in my cardboard box and listen to the train whistle in the distance. It was a train that I used to ride all the time, but now I am all by myself in a little square area that I call my own. I guess I should not say alone. There are several more around me. Just like me. Homeless. These are my friends now. Francine, she's to my left. Hector, that old hole-ridden wool hat on his head, is on my right. Past them are several others as well, but their names escape me at the moment. It seems there is always a new member joining the homeless club. I make the most of it though. In the daytime, I walk around trying to find any loose change that any of the suit wearers are prone to drop. Sometimes I am lucky enough to find a dollar's worth. Other times, well, just a dime. That's when I just stash it in my sock and add it to any others that are in there. Actually, I like to feel the coins jiggle against my toes. Kind of makes me feel rich. I especially like it when one gets away and gets cold and when I move my foot, the chill of it dances across my digits. Yeah, I really like that. Consider that my coin fetish. Sometimes Francine walks with me when I hunt. Her frail body bends and hobbles in ways that look as if she is gonna break. Her black bones are stronger than they look. Oh, I didn't mention that she was of color? I guess I didn't think it was pertinent. It really is not when I think of it. Francine could fight off anyone in an attack. Unfortunately, attacks are common here on the street. Poor Hector over there was pushed around a bit the other night by some thugs that were having fun. Too much fun actually. Hector suffered a few bruised ribs and a very black eye. If it had not been for Francine walloping the offender with her heavy bag of God-only-knows-what, Hector could be dead. See, I told you all Francine was more feisty than she looks. But on the subject of death, all too often that happens out here. I've seen my share of the homeless ones here fall to the elements. Many times it's the cold that gets them. Many just do not have the correct clothes to stay warm enough and they freeze to death. We do not always have a fifty-five gallon drum to build a fire. Even if we did, we all need to sleep. It's hard to build a fire and keep it going when energy is what we need. Then there are those that have medical conditions that never get treated. I feel for them. Francine knows she has diabetes and it is apparent that she does not get enough nourishment for that. I worry about her more than I do myself. That's why I always try and make sure she has something to eat. However, there

are days when she does not eat a thing. Francine says she is fine, but I know that's not the case. Hector, well, he is a war-torn Vietnam veteran with shrapnel still in his leg that causes him pain and a severe limp. On top of that, he has developed a really deep cough that I am sure is pneumonia. But he is ready to go. He told me so the other day. I really hate to say this, but I know it won't be much longer. One of these days, Francine and I are going to wake up and find Hector gone. It's just going to happen. Other than hypothermia and medical conditions, natural causes are to blame. Wait a minute; can natural causes be a blame? No, that's not right. Natural causes just happen. For some of the many homeless, they have been out here for years. As time passed for them, so did their lives. As for me, I never thought I'd be homeless; not in a million years. I had a good job as a branch manager of a local bank here in town. That was until I was accused of embezzling, for which I did not do. Suddenly I had a reputation and never could find work again. Of course, that became stress on my family. I had a loving wife and a daughter and son whom I loved with all my heart. I still do. But my wife couldn't take me not having a job and my daughter and son pretty much shunned me away. Well, my son did for sure. My daughter, however, she has a heart. She does not know I see her sometimes looking in on me. She'll stand at the end of the alley and stare. She never approaches though. She's too scared to do so. I don't blame her. I would not want to approach myself if I were her. That's why I never go to her when I catch her checking on me. I'd rather spare her the grief. At least I know she still cares. So, in the divorce, my ex-wife got everything. I mean everything. I stayed in a hotel for a couple weeks as I tried to find work, but what little money I had, ran out and since then, I've been sharing this alley with Francine and Hector and the other no-named ones with us. In the morning when I awake, the same routine will start all over again. I'll try and find spare change. Francine will more than likely join me. Hector will stay huddled against the brick wall. We'll find food somehow and bring it to Hector. It may not be much, but it will be something. With what little change Francine or I find or get as a donation, we'll buy something to drink. If there's enough, I will splurge for a bottle of alcohol just to sooth the bones. Of course, I'll share it with Francine and Hector. In the end, however, it's always the same. That, I feel, will never change. Francine, Hector, and I, as well as the ones whose names I never got or even escaped my brain, will be right here in this alley. The train whistle will continue to blow as well, signifying what we are. Homeless.