

Finding Home

The sun is going down. The wind is picking up. It'll be night within the hour.

I pull my old Akubra hat across the dirty concrete and look inside. Several silver and gold coins sit at the bottom. After a quick glance, I guess eight dollars and thirty cents. It's a game I like to play every afternoon.

I pull out the coins one by one and add them up: \$1.50, \$2.50, \$2.70, \$3.20.

The last coin, a corroded twenty-cent piece, brings the total to seven dollars and twenty-five cents.

Pretty close.

I place the hat on my head, fold up my cardboard sign and clamber to my feet with a groan. My body aches and burns from a day spent sitting in the sun. The tall buildings make the wind fast and cold. It makes me shiver.

I start walking, stiff at first, towards the convenience store on the corner. People give me a wide berth and bow their heads as I walk past. Maybe it's the smell. Maybe it's shame.

Then again, nobody talks to anyone anymore.

I reach the convenience store, my arms folded to combat the cold. A group of young boys walk out as I walk in. One of them brushes against my moth-eaten sweater. I turn back to see him rubbing the touch off his arm, a look of disgust on his face. His friends all laugh as they walk away.

I nod at Carl, the cashier. He grimaces. I feel guilty whenever I come in to buy dinner.

But desperation outranks pride.

I stroll to the bread section, grab the cheapest white loaf, and then head to the spreads. I don't like peanut butter, but it keeps.

I walk to the counter, the change jingling in my loose pocket. There's a stack of 4L water bottles next to the counter. I place the bread and peanut butter on the counter before a disapproving Carl, grab a bottle with my withered hands and slide it beside dinner. Carl rings it up, not saying anything. I fish for the change as a middle-aged man stands behind me, burning a hole in the back of my head.

"Six dollars eighty," Carl says without tone.

I place all the coins on the counter. Carl picks them up like they're infected and drops them into the cash register.

"Thank you," I say, my voice strained.

Carl gives a curt nod as I put the remaining coins in my pocket and struggle out the door with my hands full. The sun is behind the skyscrapers, spilling through the cracks. I shuffle along the pathway, parting people like the Red Sea.

After ten minutes of walking, I come across an empty alleyway. There's graffiti on the walls, and it smells of rotting fish. I walk down to the end, where there's an industrial-sized bin, and collapse on the unforgiving concrete beside it. I let out a big sigh.

This is it.

Home.

Until tomorrow.