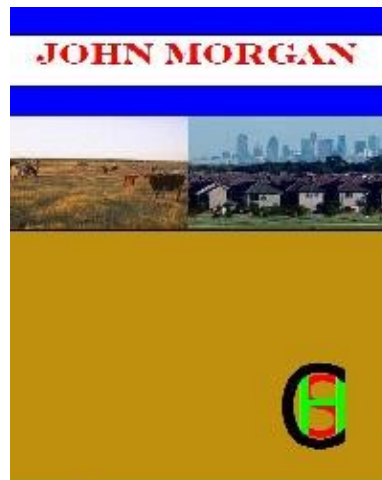


The Unseen World of John Morgan

By : **SHC**

Ol' John Morgan is a well known story of wealth, love, and life lost. This is the little told, little known story of the poor man standing at the corner begging for something to eat. He has a story full of love, adventure, family, gain, life, and tragedy. The homeless man has a story. This is only one of them.



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Ol' John Morgan
BY SHC

Chapter 1

Present Day

Leaves flew from the trees as a strong wind blew from the north. The temperature hovered between 60 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit, all day long. Busy, the traffic was congested all day long. Holidays were nearing and shoppers were out and about. It was cold but there were no clouds and all but the snow junkies and farmers were pleased. Recent pay cuts and lack of bonuses had people in a stressful frenzy.

Stop lights flashed green yellow and red. The drivers would screech to a stop or race the red. All were impatient to get to the next store, the coffee shop, the gas station, or back home. School was out due to it being Saturday. Gangs of kids strolled the shops, sidewalks, and parking lots looking for something to do. Old men sat on benches or in their cars waiting for old women. Pudgy parents chased pudgy toddlers. Teen girls with over priced purses went from store to store looking for deals and teen boys. Teen boys with overpriced sneakers and tire rims went from parking lot to parking lot looking for trouble and teen girls. Police roamed looking for troublesome teens, misbehaving pick pockets, fender benders, tickets, and friends to talk to.

It was a good nice day. All was good all was just the way it should be. Nothing was out of place. Nothing, save for the bundle of scarves and jackets on the corner. It stood there with a very ugly brown cardboard sign. The sign in smeared Sharpie read, 'Hungry and Homeless Please Help'. The bundle didn't match any of the surroundings. Next to the manicured bushes, hedges, and the architecturally engineered artistic sidewalk it was offensive. The apparent poverty of this creature was blatantly rude and depressing. Good citizens and Christians had been calling the police all day to have the trespasser thrown in jail. Never the less the heap was still there.

Vehicles passing by would throw slurs and cruel slanders at the bundle. A glass beer bottle had even been thrown at it. Shattering it hit the sidewalk and the beer splashed all over it. Still it stayed. The bundle of rags should have had more decency. It was plain as day that it was not attractive. All could see how poor and how truly down trodden the creature was. To most it wasn't even human. To all, it was depressing to see such lack of wealth.

"Get a job you slob!!!" came from the passenger's window. The SUV with spinning rims and a Jesus sticker screeched off. It swerved away ignoring all traffic laws.

An old man that had been walking into a restaurant had observed the incident. Humbly he approached the heap of jackets. Offering up his own jacket he asked if there was anything he could and promised after handing over a dollar bill he would bring him a to-go coffee.

Another half hour went by. An old sedan with fading paint handed him a dollar. Latter a squealing Toyota truck with a lawn mower and four big guys handed him a taco, a free lawn clipping card, two dollars, and change.

The old man from the restaurant never came back. Comically a Hybrid with a Coexist sticker and slew of Democratic hippy stickers on their bumper had cussed him out. Slowly it had pulled up acting like they would be generous, kind, or thoughtful. The window had rolled down issuing a cloud of marijuana smoke. A kid, no older than 15, stuck his head out.

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"Hey geezer where's the dealer? He said he'd be standing near a Mercedes. Well there's the Mercedes," He pointed at a Mercedes parked at the restaurant behind him. "Well have you seen him?"

The heap of jackets shook its head.

"Huhâ  fine you stupid bum. I won't be giving you the end of my nub. You f****ing bum someone should make you bleed. I can't stand your type. It should be a crime to be poor. As a matter of fact it is. You are a criminal. Loitering is punishable by law. And you're trespassing on this parking lot and sidewalk. I'm going to call the cops." Turning to the driver, "hey man let's go find some dope and I hear he got some hash this week." The car drove off.

Slowly the sun started to set. 55 degrees flashing on the bank's sign dropped to 43 degrees. The street lights and the cars' headlights flickered on. Sure enough the kid had called the police. Unlike other citizens this kid smoking dope most likely has wealthy influential parents. Therefore when he calls the police they respond. Case in point two minutes after the Hybrid Subaru pulled off a police car pulled into sight. Due to the freezing cold and a set on of Parkinson's the heap wasn't as fast to clear the area before the police car could approach. The backpack was on. The grocery bag full of the last month's donations was in hand. He was just about to push the button for the crosswalk. That's whenâ 

"Hey Ol' Morgan where the hell do you think you're goin'? Hey!!! I'm talkin' to you! Turn around!!!" The sheriff's shiny car pulled up alongside him completely ignorant of the traffic he was blocking. It was the most feared and hated of the whole force. This man was even hated by his own squad. "So what you'd panhandle this week?" Walking over he turned the heap around to grab his grocery bag. "Hmmâ   not too bad. A Snickers bar, some soap (you definitely stink), a free lawn clipping (that's stupid you're just a worthless bum like you'd ever have a home), ooh and a pack of cigarettes." The sheriff smiled that foul and dreadful sort of way.

The bag of goodies that had been piling up for almost two months Ol' Morgan had been wishing to go through slowly. The candy bar he had kept so safely in his back pack he had taken it out earlier to have as a treat after he was done. It had been treasured and guarded over since a month ago. The cigarettes he kept to use to barter for clothes and change from convicts getting out of the nearby jail. Contrary to the sheriff's belief he had bought the soap himself only three hours ago at the 98 Cent Store. Not only that, but the grocery bag had two half eaten to go boxes, a warm dollar burger, a milk carton, and his only bottle of aspirin.

"Well, I think I'll confiscate this for evidence of your apparent vagrancy. But here keep this and this." He took out one bar of soap and the free lawn clipping card. "The soap is for the smell and the card is just in case you ever need a lawn mowed." Chuckling he walked back to his car. Laughing even louder, "You having a lawn or a house what a joke," hysterically laughing, "Now next time I ketch you panhandling I'm gonna whop your ass then take you to lock up!!!" Just before speeding off the passenger window rolled down. "Honey would you?" could be heard inside.

A girl no older than 16 in the passenger's seat, "Okay honey bear." Looking with disgust at the homeless man, "Here you pervert bum we don't need any sour milk!" The full milk carton came flying out the window.

The homeless man didn't catch the milk carton and it spilt all over him. Squealing laughter and tires the police car sped off.

Though the wind calmed a little the temperature was still 43 degrees and starting to flicker 42. Nevertheless he was now soaked to the bone. Reeking of stale beer and milk he crossed the road. Most stores were closing; aspirin would have to wait till tomorrow. Arthritis was starting to make his left leg ache again. Most would lie down, call a cab, or even an ambulance the pain was not only unbearable it was making it hard to breathe.

Through the haze of his vision he could see the sign of the Circle K spinning slowly. The glow of the neon sign fell upon the homeless man. A chime of the door startled the owner from his slumber behind the counter. Until he recognized the homeless man he was about to turn his Wi-Fi Bollywood Radio down. He pulled his hand from the radio and went to stocking cigarettes.

1 + 5 + 2 + 55 cents +.10 + .50 equal enough for a treat. Two months ago it was his 80th birthday. There was no celebrating two months ago he had a spider bite. A brown recluse had crawled into his blankets when he was sleeping. It hadn't bit him till it crawled into his shirt. Due to his thick skin he didn't even feel the spider crawling on him. Just as he walked into the welfare center to check the bulletin board for work a warm burning sting hit his lower extremities. The spider had crawled into his pants. He had reached down to scratch

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his upper thigh and that's when the spider attacked. The spider bit him three times. All the while in the crowded welfare office he was jumping up and down trying to find the cause of the burning sensation.

"Are you okay?" A little toddler looked at him sideways.

"Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!," he kept jumping up and down.

"Maybe it's a new dance!" A mentally handicapped man started imitating him. Up and down the man hopped. The toddler tried to join in but their parent stopped them with a glare and yank of their arm. All people in the office save for one smiling Spanish lady had snarls on their faces. Right then he overheard the social service worker at the counter calling the police. He had to leave before the psychologist came out of her office. At a glance, this cold hearted lady could have a person thrown in an institution no need of evidence or reason and with no issues in court. For the next month he had to recover from this spider bite. With no medicine except for one give away 8oz bottle of old aspirin at the clinic and with no proper nutrition it was a long painful month.

But what would be worthy of an 80th birthday treat? He decided to splurge on a dollar beer and a Snickers bar. Unlike some of the street wanderers and contrary to popular belief alcohol in anyway was out of the question. Just the smell of it on a homeless man and they could be locked up for drinking in public. But due to the smell of his rotting teeth and availability to a shower he and many other homeless would get a smell that was hard to bare. Most people that were not homeless would blame the smell on alcohol. If only they could see what happens when they don't take a shower for months on end and try not having a dentist. Maybe then they would know the truth of what that rotting smell comes from. But not wanting to upset a potential donation or admit to having such horrible hygiene Morgan would agree or even say the smell was from a tasty beer. It was always easier that way.

He approached the counter with ease. The store was empty of customers. Quiet, save for a computer radio softly playing some Hindi music, only Morgan and the owner were to be found in that part of the world.

"Is that all?" the owner monotonously rang up the items.

"That's it."

"Hey, it must be some special occasion or something. What is it Ol' Morgan? I never see you buy beer. What was it almost a year ago since I last saw you purchase a beer?" Morgan could never fool that man. He was always keen on everything.

"Oh, nothing just my birthday."

"Really? You must be what a hundred years old now. Like as old as Mohammed himself." A smile wrinkled on the owner's face. A face that was as weathered and tough as Morgan's.

Morgan laughed, "Yeah and who's speaking?"

"Oh I'm not that old. I'm only 79."

"And I'm 80."

"Well I don't turn 80 for another three months. So, you're like an ancient ruin compared to me."

"So those three months automatically make you 20 years younger than me?"

"Exactly"

Quietly laughing to themselves about a simple similarity they connected on a level close to friendship. Though neither one was born in the same town or had any similar acquaintances in that split second it was easy to see that the two had more in common then could be deduced from the outward appearance. Two commonly out casted old men shared a common thread of age that made them both laugh in spite of public opinion.

A minute later that moment would be shattered for in a noisy display of ego two pimped out vehicles screeched into the parking lot. Both old men went into a stiff defensive mode. The owner turned his radio off and Morgan quickly grabbed his stuff. But before Morgan turned away the owner stopped him.

"Here I was going to throw these out any way." He gave Morgan a whole two grocery bags full of packaged pastries.

"How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing, go ahead and take them or I'll have to throw them away."

"I mean for the beer and candy bar."

"Oh just think of it as a birthday gift. Hey and here's a bunch of bananas." The owner loaded a huge bunch of

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bananas into a grocery bag. He also threw in a lighter. "You know my wife a devout Muslim and my own mother a devout Hindu are always bugging me about charity. I swear it's the only thing those two agree on and the two are always after me about it. Women you know."

"Thank you Jackson."

"No worries, now you take care and don't go telling everyone about this. I'm not usually so generous. It's just I like you, you don't steal from me, you are not racist, you never threaten me, you are polite, honest, even in your shape in your poverty you are still good and those are hard found traits in this place." The owner's eyes read the deepest sincerity.

BING, BING, BANG! The kids that had screeched in had gone into the tattoo parlor next door and now they were entering the store. Blazing cuss words, profanities, and racial slurs the five girls and two adults advanced upon the store. Morgan without another word raced out the door. A girl with a Gucci bag purposely blocked Morgan's path out the door.

"OMG. What a disgusting bum. So what would you do for a dollar you pervert? You know my stepmom would pay for a trick, you know a sexual one." All the other customers cracked up laughing.

Morgan pushed past the thirteen year old. She glared with the most hopeless look of loss in her eyes. Cruelty reeked all over the adolescent.

In a fit of rage she uttered, "Watch it old man! Oh my god he touched me. SEXUAL HARASSMENT! Stupid perv."

"God he touched you. I hope he didn't give you Typhoid," A girl even younger than the other added.

"Or Clemidia." Another joined in.

"No that was your boyfriend who gave me that," the thirteen year old answered the twelve year old.

A man in his late twenties laughed at a man turning thirty that day. Clueless to the guys ages the girls thought they were only 20 and 21.

The thirty year old man chuckled, "Oh Tiff your just a slut sleeping with your uncle and this homeless man."

Completely affected by the cruel comment she quietly responded, "No I'm not only you baby."

Disgustingly the thirty year old walked over to the girl and grabbed her ass. He then along with the other man started yelling at the owner to hurry it up and get them their booze and the pink pills, Prozac for women or girls. Racist slurs raced from one man to the other. After paying they made jokes about robbing the store and 'putting a bullet in his skull'. This, the owner knew, they could do and get away with.

Morgan walked away with his head down. He had to shake his head when he passed by the vehicles parked in the lot. One lifted overly improved custom painted truck and a lowered corvette with spinning rims screamed egotistical assholes. Along with just the simple first impression one look closer and it was easy to see they were scum. A hitch cover on one was a highly detailed penis and a sticker on the back window was a highly detailed naked girl. On the other vehicle the license plate read, 'SK00IG1RLS'. On the license plate cover it read 'Pimp'.

Arthritis made the walk to camp slow. Half way there he sat at an unnoticeable picnic table in the industrial park. The beer was icy cold and made him recall old sweet hard to bare memories. Smells of a furnace turning on and diner on the stove, the sound of an active home, sounds of children playing in the yard, an announcer on TV advertising insurance, the taste of a Miller beer from a 12 pack, sunlight from a setting sun drifting through the dust in the air, and a dog curled up at his feet drifted painfully slow through his mind. A tear rolled down leather cheeks and got lost in the weeds growing at his feet.

Shooting pains in his back subdued and the arthritis was tolerable, the cheap beer was harsh but it gave him a false sense of hope. Though idiotic in scope, he felt like he was just like any other person for that hour he took sipping his beer. He felt like he did when he wasn't homeless. He felt normal. He felt for that one hour like he was just an average citizen. Not a hobo, not a stain on society, not weird, not a criminal, not a drain on the world; he felt like every other average American after work. Sitting down and popping a top not an alcoholic just an adult taking it easy. Just like all the adults at this time of night would be doing, sitting down at a table or in front of a TV with a glass of wine or a can of beer. Sitting down sipping a drink without a worry in the world, but he knew that sort of thing was almost not allowed for his type.

Against all unwritten laws of the homeless drinking was not a luxury. All alcohol was allowed for was to clean wounds with and as a pain killer nothing more. Those who openly drank on the streets in public were

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usually either not homeless or would end up in jail a lot.

Now that he was calm and didn't feel the pain so much Morgan could start to smell the beer stains on his clothes from earlier. Yet, to find an open and free laundry machines was impossible. Recently the place to wash clothes was a very pious church that had self righteous converters but at this hour it would be closed. One other place, but it was a last resorts, had been known to have people beat up or thrown in jail. The place was a low income housing mainly used to house out going inmates on parole. It was fine every once in awhile but the property owners didn't like bums using their facilities to wash clothes. The residents didn't mind at all. Problem was the property owner's kids were always ending up in prison and so whenever they were unemployed or on parole they would stay there. That was when the facilities were off limits and even a danger zone. Those months residents would actually lock their valuables in their trunks.

Morgan couldn't stand the smell any more. He decided he'd scope the place out. If he saw the owners' vehicles he would just go to the park a mile away and wash his clothes in the bathroom sink. A sigh of relief approaching the tenement he could easily see the owners' kids were not home. Spanish children and a group of hippies were out under the big old trees. A game of soccer was under way and people were sitting around smoking. He immediately made his way to the laundry in the building.

An old Apache woman was drying clothes on wires. She had just pinned up the last of her laundry when she noticed Morgan.

"Hola Morgan, como estas?" She remembered his name.

"Bien."

"Here is some soap if you could watch my things. I have to go to the bathroom. And, whew, you definitely need your clothes cleaned." She smiled then accidently dropped enough change to use the dryer. The dryer of course was a pay machine, unlike the washer.

All of his clothes were washed and dried when the Apache woman returned in a frenzy. Running in she almost tripped and fell. Morgan caught her. In her eyes was panic and fear.

All she said as she grabbed all her laundry was, "There here, there hereâ Aquîâ aqui"

She flew out the door with laundry dragging and dropping. Morgan rushed to put his clothes on. Sure enough just as he opened the door onto the hallway the front doors facing the laundry room banged open. He nearly closed the door and hid behind as two big biker guys strolled into the hallway. Hiding behind the door of the laundry room, Morgan's heart raced with fear. He could hear loud stomps in the hallway. Thuds could be heard coming his way. Quickly he thought of just opening the door and running for an exit. Just then he heard one of the men yelling.

"Gus! Where yuh goin?!?"

"None of your business."

"Hey have mom clean your shirt at home. The Mexicans use those washers could have deceases in it."

"Your right cuz." The stomps stopped at the laundry doors.

Morgan stood there. All he could hear for one whole moment was his loud heart beat and breathing. He was scared that for how loud his breathing and heart beat was the man on the other side of the door would surely hear it.

The world stood still for that minute. All plans of escape had escaped his mind.

In three shorts seconds, in two short breaths that biker would bust through that door. He would bust the door down and then bust his head open.

The door knob turned and the door creaked and millimeter. Then the door stayed that way as footsteps retreated back down the hallway and up the stairs. Running he got himself out of that building as fast and as invisible as possible. He didn't look back until he got to the over pass and his camp.

It was relieving to see that all the make shift shelters were still standing. From the smell and the small noises of discomfort he could tell mostly everyone was still there. No one was dead, corpses smell better. No one from what he could gather died, got in a pedestrian accident, thrown in jail, or thrown in an institution. It was a small found comfort that he wasn't completely alone. His circumstantial friends were more like family than his own. For most days he was all by himself and alone.

He crawled into an unoccupied pile of clothes, plastic bags, and blankets. As always it itched with filth, fleas, ticks, and piss from animals in the region. Compared to other nights it was easier to sleep. Since the property

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owners had been keeping police and social service workers off his land they had a short window of unbothered sleep. Unbothered in the way of no raids, unbothered did not include the ever present suburb thugs raiding their camps or the lack of food that drove people to violence toward one another. Unbothered only meant not harassed by the better off, it was a blessing few knew.

Slowly the sound of his heartbeat put him into a restless sleep. Far away the midnight's train passed by blowing horns. The sound of that train made him think of memories often visited in his recent despair. Memories flashed in his mind of a big red barn with fading paint, a little brown eyed girl with a teddy bear, a golden brown field in the sun light, an old blue truck tailgate down train passing by and his soul mate in his arms.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Five Years Ago

A helicopter flew high above the city swooping and diving every now and then. They were on the hot pursuit of an escape artist. Four times already this man had escaped prison and this would be the last time. At the moment he was running through the park. Under the oaks, over the baseball fields, and finally past the soccer field the man was not slowing.

The CB blared, "Subject is now heading northeast. Subject is heading toward the river. At the river subject will be lost in the suburb. Units stop subject before river."

"CAPTIAN I'll engage on foot. Drop me at the basketball courts!" A low ranking officer, who had been on traffic duty for the last two years, finally got his shot at the big leagues in this sudden chase. It was three forty-five when the convict escaped the county lock up. A second later and the call had been sent out. The rookie was at the station at the time. The captain told everyone at the station to suit up.

Four fifteen read the clock and the criminal was on the brink of escaping. Something had to be done. The rookie saw his shot at being the hero of the day.

"Okay," the captain gave him the usual look of doubt, "Land over the courts!!!"

As soon as the helicopter was ten feet from the ground the rookie jumped out and made it for the convict. The helicopter had landed ahead of the fleeing felon but as the helicopter swooped down the convict sped up. Booking it the man was already past the courts when the rookie leaped out of the air.

Not looking back the convict slid across the frozen parking lot. A blockade was nearing the other end of the park. He jumped over the skidding squad car. The rookie on his tail slammed into the car and screamed out unclear profanities. In the mist of the oncoming morning a huge freighter passed under the bridge. A light turquoise color was rising from the eastern horizon. Smells of baked goods and coffee rose from the surrounding city. A convict in the rags of orange and with nothing but socks on his feet and hands, he had lost his shoes in escaping. The world went by and started its day again without any notice of the chase. A Waste Management truck slowly pulled up to the dumpster in front of the bridge. For a split second the assailant was blocked from view.

The rookie cursed again and yelled at the dump truck driver for getting in his way. At that moment a unit of Swat screeched to a halt at the opposite end of the bridge blocking the runner's escape route. Now he stood in the middle of the bridge out of breath unable to move. Milliseconds passed by like hours. Slowly like pitch from a dying tree time dripped away. Breaths escaped lungs of a convict on the run.

The rookie approached on foot and he stopped when he got close to the man. Hopeless floated over the two mans' minds. It wouldn't be long until the Swat team started to move on the bridge. The rookie's CB blared, "SHOOT him!!!" The man had no weapon and it was apparent he was contemplating jumping.

Climbing over the safety fence the man in rags looked into the dark black water. The water swiftly flowed under the bridge, beneath the freighter, out pass the delta, under the Golden Gate Bridge, and finally out to the Pacific Ocean. Every year it claimed at least eight swimmers and was well known for it's under current.

Jumping into it the man knew he only had a ten percent chance of surviving. Even if he survived he would still have to deal with having a hefty warrant on his head. The sun started to rise and a chilling wind blew through the trees. Clouds high up in the atmosphere signaled snow in the mountains and rumors floated around that that year the snow may reach the valley. Frost on the ground and trees signaled the freezing temperature. The chance of survival in that weather went from 10% to more like 3% but he was not going back to jail. He went to take a cigarette and a lighter out of his jacket, one more puff before his inevitable end. From far away, a few onlookers had gathered on the jogging path as the event came to its climax. All that could be seen were the two units on opposite sides of the bridge and two men, one of which was standing on the fence rail looking into the water.

A shot was heard and a body splashed into the water.

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37.9 Miles Away and Five Hours Later

An automatic door swooshed open and close. A cash register clicked open and clicked closed. A printer beeped and a receipt on carbon copy paper printed up. A cashier said usual departing comments, "Have a good day, thank you for shopping here, and see you next time." A cart squeaked out the automatic doors. All day long the hours went by with the usual same monotony. Three times the store was rushed. In the morning, at noon, and finally two hours before closing, the hours came and the hours went. Once in the day the usual character would roll through give some unspoken piece of wisdom or make a joke that would last the week through.

That particular day two characters graced the lumber store. An old bankrupt farmer in his old blue dodge truck clunked into the yard around the noon rush. An old golden laughter drifted in on the breeze as the usual pushy unpleasant city slickers passed through. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when Old Blue, as they all called him, clunked into the yard. As usual he was followed by his rough neck friends. An aged kind of white Oldsmobile gurgled into the handicapped parking spot and the driver pulled out his walker. Three assorted trucks all with matching scrapes and dents raced to get behind Old Blue. Finally a squealing sedan with peeling paint pulled into the parking lot. All the passenger doors opened up and seven Latinos poured out and into the store. A hoarse voice followed them with instructions to pouring a cup of coffee for him. Ten minutes later a group of old rough neck men came sauntering in from the yard. The group came in through the contractor's entrance. Loudly they were arguing about who was the hardest worker and how they all still worked, which was nevertheless tall tales. One was talking to a dirt covered boy in Spanish they were discussing politics as usual. The group of Latinos was laughing and making jokes towards the old men as they walked pass them out to the yard to pick up scrap wood from the bins. One very dark skinned old man hit at one of them with a rolled up Blue Angels magazine. They all laughed and then the old man with the walker decided to join the Latinos in a scrap bin scavenger hunt.

The cashier smiled as she saw them approaching. All but one went to the center counter to gossip with the managers and owner. The one that broke away was Old Blue himself he wandered up to the cashier. Passing by the boom box he switched it to a country radio station. One of the shop-lifting department heads glared his way. Laughing he walked up to the cashier.

All the while the men gossiped at the center counter Old Blue and the cashier talked about everything but gossip. A couple customers came through the line but the manager had called up the cashier that was in the back smoking dope. Old Blue, though old, unfashionable, rough necked, and seeming of little wealth was actually the wealthiest of all the customers. He was even the wealthiest of all the contractors. Last time he was interrupted in the weekly conversation with the cashier he liked he forgot to buy his load of lumber for his recent porch rebuild and went to the competing lumber store with his business. Therefore every time after that day when Old Blue showed up the other cashier that usually was allowed to slack off was required to man their cash register. Most days when this particular cashier, whom Old Blue revered as his own daughter, was working no other cashiers had to. She took up the work of three cashiers. Because of this the other cashiers didn't work the days she worked.

It made the other cashiers hate the girl. The managers were always using her as an example and the customers were always singing her praises. She unknowingly evoked a deep hatred towards herself. For the time she had a job, for the time she was the wealthiest man's adopted daughter. Politics, religion, war, peace, culture, car talk, fashion, education, and all topics other than gossip made their way through their conversations. Never did they put anyone down; rarely did they talk about people they knew, even more rarely did they speak about other's misfortunes, and they never talked behind people's backs. They were always as honest and straight forward as they could be. The conversations were regal and sophisticated. Many would mistake them for being college educated. Neither one had ever even been on a college campus. The most formal education they had was from technical schools.

An hour went by like the breeze in the trees. Neither one knew how long they talked. It didn't matter for that hour they were almost family. For the countless minutes the two conversed like well rehearsed political candidates. Both with different objective views, neither one afraid to say what was on their minds both Old Blue and the cashier would years later think back on simple wisdoms learned in their talks.

The conversations always ended in the usual way. The group at the center counter would wonder to the front.

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In a slow agonizing process the men would make and take back purchases. Always in search of any deal they could get they would hassle the cashier not talking to Old Blue.

"This PVC pipe is scratched and should be discounted."

"I found this piece of birch in the scrap bin."

"I only have 98 bolts and nuts, not 100. Here let's count 'em to make sure."

By the time the old men were done the cashier not talking to Old Blue would be on the verge of strangling someone. Purchases made and all said and done one of them would pull Old Blue along with them. Smiling he would pull himself away.

The day would then slip into a golden auburn sunset. The other cashier would count out; then clock out. All the yard, contractors department, and most of the store would go home. All but four would clock out. One manager, one puller, one gate guard, and one cashier would be left for one more hour. In that hour if there was nothing left to do the manager would wander up to the front. The cashier and manager would talk, chit chat, or just simply watch the sunset. It was a simple existence but it was an honest existence. But, most days with her incurable thirst for excitement she would take routes that would range from 5 to 15 miles long. It wasted gas, it wasted money, and it wasted time. Those road trips would someday be what kept her from dread. Those dirt roads and skinny winding highways gave her a sense of freedom that would never be replaced.

Most days if not busy she would find her way to a certain muddy pond like lake. A place few knew about those days was the sanctuary of the few country kids left in the area. A little place called Camp Far West had hunting, fishing, and one long dirt highway circling it and connecting it to five hick towns. Though in a short time, as everyone knew, the lake would no longer allow fishing, hunting, or even dirt roads. In a truck her mother had graciously gave to her she would tear up the dirt highway, jump a fence to go swim, and chase friends in their beater vehicles. A couple times she won in the usual off the road races, where contestants try to drive one another off the road. This made her a legend. The only girl, besides Grandma Anne, that could hold a candle to the boys. She was one of the few that even held the same esteem. She wasn't an A+ student; she wasn't much of prep; she wasn't much of a looker. But, she had a heart of a thousand men, the soul of Gandhi, the courage of a king, and was like no other. Problem her grandfather was a grand mason therefore she could never get a date and very few would even be her friend. It was just the way things were and it didn't matter much back in those days.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3

2010

A monsoon of a storm hit the city. A person with a bright green umbrella crossed the six lane highway. Not in knowledge of the cold or even the rain. It was as though there was no rain. The person crossed the parking lot and finally entered a store. A gale wind hit just as the person entered the store. No one could be found in a five mile radius. All were busy staying out of the rain. Most everyone bickered and whined about the weather. Most preferred clear skies.

The wind still howled but the monsoon slowed to a shower and a creature crawled out from a bush under a building. It made its way to the store the green umbrella had entered. Standing there it shivered. A man in Calvin Klein walked out; the creature put its hand out and asked for a hand out. The man sniffed made a comment under his breath and stomped off. A bit put off by the lack of humanity in the world the creature just stood there. Water dripped from an indescribable pile of rags draped over him. Little could be said about this creature there was nothing to say what it was. All that could be told is it walked on two legs and was in crushing poverty.

The automatic doors slid open and a bright green umbrella poked out. The person attached to the umbrella was singing a song about how "rain is a good thing". A lady came almost skipping along. If it wasn't so frowned upon, it was apparent she would have been dancing. Seeing the creature she automatically pulled out all the change she had. Smiling she asked about the welfare of other homeless people. As though she was asking and talking about family members there was not one note of disgust in her voice. She didn't see a creature in rags. She saw her father in poverty and in need of a helping hand. It was a simple thing she stood for but it made all the difference. Humanity is what kept the heart from giving up and reminded the hopeless that there was still love in the world. In bankruptcy herself, unemployed for over three years, and in need of a helping hand herself she still gave what little she had to those in need. If given the ability she would do far more.

For a short time she spoke with the homeless man. She learned his name to be Morgan. He came to know that there was a good person left in the city. She let him know that he could ask anything and she would do her best to help.

A manager of the store walked out and gave a signal for them to keep going. After warm farewells the two stopped loitering and moved along. Morgan made his way into the warm and dry store. The bright green umbrella bobbed across the parking lot and across the crosswalk. She tried not to smile when she saw an old friend in the driver's seat of a squad car. From since she knew him he was not the most law abiding of citizens. But to get to carry a weapon, drive a fast car, and to get to run red lights it wasn't a surprise. Secretly she liked him and secretly he had gone out of his way to go out on patrol when he saw her pass by the station. It had been almost three years since he had made lieutenant. He had made it into the sheriff's department. In 2007 he had stopped a notorious criminal. This had elevated him to a position that made him a necessary member of the squad. Now he worked towards a better package and better benefits. But at the moment he was quite comfortable. With an almost new used truck and having just moved from the one bedroom to a two bedroom with yard and garage life was just right. A new girlfriend whom his parents adored made him the talk of the town. People aspired to be him and used him as an example. No one knew how truly unhappy he was.

At the same time every day the notorious La Vida Loca, as everyone called the girl, would pass by the station on her way to the stores. At the same time every day the lieutenant would go out on patrol. To escape the brainless chatter and gossip of his coworkers he would make up some excuse about the same time of the day. The others joked and made fun of him but it didn't matter. He couldn't stand sitting behind a desk, even though he could now do that with the new position. Lieutenant Neo, as they all called him due to a near death experience when he was a traffic cop, set out a half hour after La Vida Loca passed by the station. As usual he missed her again but he didn't miss the sheriff heading to harass a homeless man again. The

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sheriff being stopped in traffic, Lieutenant Neo was able to beat him to the homeless man. Rolling up he was not at all surprised to see Ol' Morgan. For some unknown reason the sheriff, or Robo cop as some called him, absolutely hated Ol' Morgan. Some said it was because back when the sheriff was a lieutenant the old Boss Hog of the town would constantly send him on errands for Ol' Morgan. "Take Morgan to the shelter. Give Morgan a lift to the clinic. Arrest the lawyer's kid who stole Morgan's cigarettes." These were rumored to really piss off the Robo cop whom became the next sheriff due to a very suspicious death. After the Boss Hog sheriff mysteriously ended up dead in a ditch the Robo cop became sheriff. Ever since, the new sheriff, Robo cop has had a personal vendetta for Ol' Morgan.

There were two lieutenants who served under and truly admired the old country sheriff and they would watch out for Ol' Morgan. To everyone else Ol' Morgan was just a worthless homeless man. Everyone else in the department would pick on the two officers who showed compassion for the homeless man. Calling them hobo lovers and charity cases the other officers would put them down. But this only separated them from the others. People spoke more openly with them and other homeless wouldn't panic or attack these two.

Therefore when Lieutenant Neo approached Ol' Morgan he didn't run or even frown instead Ol' Morgan actually smiled. To Ol' Morgan this lieutenant was like the son he lost. Young, naïve but he had a good heart. This was hard found in the cold concrete jungle. In a place full of hatred and cruelty, goodness was highly regarded and appreciated.

"Oh is that Griffith's boy?" Said Ol' Morgan when the squad car pulled up and the lieutenant got out.

"It is."

"I remember when you were just a lad of ten. Remember how you always had a red superman cape on?" Ol' Morgan smiled with a warm fatherly laugh.

"I do." The officer looked down at his feet embarrassed.

"Do you still have that cape?"

"No, but my mother does and every holiday I'm around she pulls it out to remind me of how nuts I was." He smiles in appreciation for a reminder of his childhood.

"Oh it wasn't nuts."

"Yes it was," the officer frowns.

"So do you have any little ones of your own?"

"No."

"No wonder,"

"What do you mean?"

"When you're a father you will understand."

"Me," the man laughs, "Oh like I'll ever be married or with kids, like I'll ever settle down. I'm a lone wolf, a free spirit, I cannot be tamed."

"You sound like I did at your age. A restless soul in search of adventure but soon just like I found at your age the biggest adventure is the adventure of love and family. The rest of life doesn't compare to what true love of a good woman and your own children can give you."

"I guess." The lieutenant catches himself looking at Ol' Morgan the bum like a long lost father he didn't know he had.

For a split second of a split moment the two are on level ground.

The CB blared and the lieutenant looked up to see the robo cop approaching.

"Morgan." The lieutenant didn't hide his haste and urgency for Morgan to move on.

Morgan simply nodded his head.

It was too late. The sheriff was only a minute away.

"Morgan get in the car."

"It's okay."

"This is not negotiable. In the car now!" He was very direct but gave Morgan a sense of protection. "It'll be okay."

The lieutenant opened the door and Morgan got in.

The sheriff rolled up just as the door closed. He got out of his car with a real pissed off look on his face.

Stomping he walked up to the lieutenant. For two whole minutes he argued with the lieutenant to release

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Morgan to him, the sheriff. He would take care of the bum for him. He told the lieutenant that there was a call that the lieutenant could handle better. The lieutenant didn't back down and eventually the sheriff pissed off for not letting him have his way squealed off.

The lieutenant then took Ol' Morgan to his camp. All the way there neither one talked. When the car was parked Ol' Morgan asked the officer if he would be okay.

"You sure it's okay going against an order could get you fired."

"Oh not me I'm a local hero didn't you know. I'll be fine. I'll make up some story about how you had a heart attack or something."

"You sure?"

"Absolutely not but it's what's right." He was serious about what he said.

"Thank you." Ol' Morgan wobbled out of the car.

"You're Welcome."

The bright green umbrella made its way home. Halfway there it stopped when a faded paint Toyota Tacoma truck squeaked stop. The rain pelted the window that slowly rolled down.

"Mi amiga, where you go?"

"Up the hill"

"No problem."

"Thank you."

"No problem."

Lifting a grocery bag with a gallon of milk in it and then pulling a backpack with a gallon of milk in it she got in the truck. The milk trips were always the most tedious. 20 pounds and 2 plus miles up a steep hill, she had no need for a tread mill or fitness gym. There were only two types of people in her area that would stop and were safe to hitch-hike. An elderly neighbor and pretty much the whole immigrant population save for a few wealthy ones. As long as the vehicle looked like it was uninsured or old, a person who couldn't afford a lawyer she could hitch a lift. Yet for all the days she walked and for all the friends she thought she had, no one but strangers ever stopped. She had even asked her so-called friends for lifts but no one not even the ones she had given lifts, lunch money, and allowed them to steal from her would budge.

But those acquaintances, the people her so-called friends said to stay away from, would without complaining, without asking for money, without any air, with fewer problems give her helping hand. These acquaintances she rarely ever saw again. These acquaintances she rarely even knew their names. But for all the times she was left in the rain and cold by her so-called friends she thanked God for her acquaintances. She knew if any one of those people, those acquaintances, ever needed help she would do her best to help them. If she ever found herself in a better situation she knew exactly who she would show favor and dote upon. It would not be the so-called friends. She would be found in the slums of her city pouring money upon those she truly considered friends. She would find herself pouring money into elderly funds and helping the homeless. But that would be if life ever got better.

Closing the truck door the whole vehicle shook. It was apparent that the vehicle wasn't registered. From the deep accent, fluent Spanish, and old world manners the driver was a new immigrant. The umbrella at her feet a gallon of milk on the floor and a gallon of milk on her lap a smile spread across her face. If she could she would buy the driver a brand new truck, no questions, plain and simple. If only life could be that simple.

No questions, plain and simple the driver dropped her off at her home. The two exchanged polite farewells and went on their way.

A week later the rain storm had moved on. The bright green umbrella leaned against a door with peeling paint. As the sun began to set a girl with faded jeans, a thin shirt, and a pair of worn sandals walked out of an apparent two generation home. Not pausing for one moment she kept walking. With head phones on she didn't even hear a car passing by with slurs spilling out at her. In her world she was not in a cold or cruel city in her mind she was in a warm tropical destination. The Latin music spilling out of her headphones and a small

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breeze blowing through her hair made everything far better. No longer did she see, hear, or even realize there were unhappy people or such negativity. In her mind the world was a wonderful place full of music, dancing, singing, parties, and happiness. It was only a state of mind.

Some would wonder and sometimes even ask how she could be so happy. She had no job, she had no opportunity, and she had nothing but poverty to look forward to. Some incorrectly believed she had to be taking or drinking something. Some would ask her what she was on. She would correctly answer the only thing she was on was life. She would think, "Why are they so unhappy?" She had no idea how little most had to complain about.

So, she skipped down to the park to play tennis. There was only one person who would play tennis with her. But the person was just a show off and was stuck up about it. Most days she would play against the wall in the court. It was a faster game anyways. Fully aware of the stupidity in it she didn't care. It gave her something to do. Plus if it was quiet at the park she could turn up her radio and get away with dancing. An hour or two went by unnoticed. Due to her recent idling and unemployment, time went by without hindrance.

The bluish brown sky turned to a brilliant pink and purple, something similar to an over done sunset painting. The colors were in such high contrast many people had to strain their eyes in order to see. Bright neon green leaves on the trees and bright neon green spears of grass, the rest was dark from the on setting shadows. The breeze turned into a wind. The temperature fell. Walking through the local slums to get to a near McDonald she walked right into a good old friend. As usual he smiled as an uncle would. She smiled back as though he was her uncle.

"Hola! Donde va senorita?" The old graying Spanish man talked to her as usually honest and caring.

"McDonalds. Como trabajo?" She always felt safe around this man.

"Horrible as usual," laughing, he tripped walking up to his door.

"Oh Garcia you okay?" The girl leapt in the direction of the man tripping to catch him.

Garcia caught himself and looked at the girl with amusement, "Oh Sophia don't worry 'bout me. The spring weather is just getting to me."

"Okay," she said with hesitation.

"Do you need a lift anywhere?"

"Oh I can manage," Sophia smiled confidently, "plus I love this weather."

"Sophia you love all weather. As a matter of fact you love everything." Garcia earnestly looked at this girl his daughter went to school with. "Sophia is there anything you don't love?"

"Um poverty and lack of parties," waving goodbye, "Aloha Garcia!"

"Hasta luego Sophia!"

As good friends with no true reason to be good friends they nonchalantly went on their own way with no care to the power behind a simple friendship. Sophia went on to her hour of drinking a dollar drink at McDonalds. Garcia went on to making a meal out of nothing for his family.

Walking to the McDonalds she took a less walked sidewalk to avoid bumping into anyone else. Instead of bumping into another person she tripped over someone. A still body was sticking out from a dark bush next to the sidewalk. Sophia had stepped on the person's leg causing her to fall to the ground. The shade under the bush she couldn't tell who the lifeless body was. It didn't even move when she had kicked the leg. The heat and her imagination weighed down on her. Legs were all she could see from where she stood.

"God I hope it's not a dead body."

Grumbling came from the bush and, "I'm not dead, unfortunately," could barely be distinguished.

A man, Ol' Morgan emerged from the bush. She grabbed his arm to steady him and help him stand up. He shook off as much of the heat as possible. But that kind of heat from poverty is impossible to shake off.

"Join me for a soda at McD's?"

"Oh I'm okay." Ol' Morgan tried his hardest to seem not needing of anything.

Sophia pulled out the last of her money, two dollars and put it in Ol' Morgan's hand. She slowly started walking towards McDonalds. A few feet away from him she stopped and turned his way.

"So you coming or what?"

"Oh sure why not?" He hurried to catch up with her.

"Just to let you know you're paying." The two laughed in the deepest understanding of one another.

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Dodging traffic at the stop light then dodging the glances or glares they made their way to the counter to order. The two ordered together. Each picking something off the dollar menu it was discouraging and embarrassing when they came up ten cents short. Glaring the teller was not going to spare ten cents for their type. Helping those two, Sophia and Morgan, the society believed did nothing but could possibly ruin a reputation. Only helping the wealthy or politically endowed did a person any good. So though many a time both Sophia and Morgan caught the tellers sparing change for other people even sparing dollars this time change would not be spared. Morgan and Sophia were too poor to take pity on. But after embarrassing the teller and some people in line they found some change. Asking people in line for ten cents they found themselves another person that was just as poor as they were. A person who truthfully shouldn't give away change right away without being asked walked up from where he was eating lunch and handed the teller a dime with a side of disapproval for all the self centered people in line.

Morgan and Sophia with gracious smiles both said thank you.

The elderly man simply nodded, then turned around and glared at everyone in line. Morgan and Sophia sat at a table outside away from the glares and opinionated glances. As they sat watching traffic come and go a truck rumbled by in the drive through. It could barely move and it stalled when it had stopped at the pickup window. From the look of it the thing looked like it had been rolled down a hill and caught on fire. A long line of traffic followed behind it a few were even honking in impatience. Morgan smiled in remembrance of the days passed by when he was the man holding up traffic. The windows were all down and it was easy to see the young man was flustered. It was easy to see he resented that old truck he drove. In a protest to the better off Sophia waved and yelled to the driver.

"I love your truck! You're a true Americana!"

The young man smirked and regained his pride. He honked his horn with enthusiasm. Morgan sat for a moment in silence. After a few minutes Sophia broke the silence with a story about an old bronco truck she once knew. Her friend had flipped it over railroad tracks. It had flipped twice landing on its side. With the help of a friend and a tow rope it was put back up on its wheels. The funny part it started right up no need for a tow truck.

"I had a truck like that. It was a red 65' Ford F100." Ol' Morgan stared out into the haze. Asphalt, traffic, and city did not cross his mind. The truck, the haze brought him back to the days of dirt, cattle, and farm. "It wasn't that long ago when I had a home of my own."

"Is that so?" Sophia looked at him with her usual inquisitive gaze.

"Two stories, red shutters, orange door, big double stacker barn, a long horned steer, a tire swing, and an ice cold pond oh those were the days." He takes a sip from his water. "Before I was homelessâ !"

"Ol' Morgan tell me more."

Chapter 4

Chapter 4

In that moment John Morgan was transported back in time. He lost twenty five years in that moment. Two boys and one girl ran from the home he built they were racing to the pond. A dog bit at their heels and barked. A moment later they were all splashing in the pond. Another moment and his beautiful wife was wiping her hands and walking out onto the wraparound porch. In a warm and tired way she smiled. A toddler was following her onto the porch. The blue eyed brunette girl yanked on her mother's skirt and she picked her up. Laughing she quietly sang to the little girl in her arms. A twig snapped under his shoe and his wife looked up smiling.

"Dad's home!" His wife waved him to come to her.

"Dadaâ !" the little girl wiggled out of her mother's arms. John ran up the porch stairs and caught the little girl just in time as she tried to go down the stairs. Holding his daughter he looked out over his land. One big barn, the pond was out of sight pass the creek and oaks. The field was a healthy bright green. It was early summer and yet the locust was already buzzing from the gentle heat. The concrete and asphalt disappeared. The honking traffic melted into the sound of locust and a mooing cow. The smell of car fumes, asphalt, and the usual city stench went away. In its place the smell of summer in Texas rolled across the farm he now looked over.

John Morgan no longer felt the constant sting of poverty or the pain in his back. At thirty five he was sore from the days' work but he was happy. He was comfortable. He was loved. He was not as poor. He had a roof over his head that he solely owned. A passed down lifestyle all was paid off, all was profitable, it was too perfect. A fertile farm, a happy family, and a beautiful home; heaven was at his feet. A tear swelled in his eye when he knew only a moment later it would be lost. All of it would be lost. Heaven was at his feet and it would soon be lost. He was lost in memories when he was rudely awakened by screeching tires.

Like a window shattering his vision came back to him the farm, his family, his heaven dissolved into the sweltering heat. Looking up he could see Sophia walking away waving good bye. A moment of sadness was put off with the chocolate Sunday she had left in front of him. The discontent he held slowly melted away as the ice cream melted in the heat. Though it would be a while till the next time he could relive those beautiful days of his youth. But luckily that one inexpensive sundae did more than he could imagine. It wouldn't be very long though till the discontent and unpleasantness would come back to haunt him. As he made his way back to the same old thoughts and life of poverty the sun set on the camp. As he took in his surroundings he found that someone had rifled through his few belongings. Leaving only trash that wasn't even his they whomever they were police or kids from the nearby suburb had decimated the camp. In a threatening message on a piece of cardboard he knew it was time to move on. In some other life he would have found who did the violent act and he would have confronted them. He would have called the Chief Sherriff himself because he knew him from school and someone would have been in trouble. But he couldn't even imagine letting his friend see him in such a state. Plus in the real world of poverty and being homeless renders a person powerless.

So picking himself up off the ground, head held high and with the wonderful dosage of Sophia's sympathy, he carried on. He carried on as he usually did. Tonight he wouldn't sleep he would wonder around the city until dawn, until he found a large rock behind a bush to sit on. At eleven he would make his way over to the Wellcome Center and for all the name it wasn't very welcoming. A couple very well used and warn couches sat adjacent to one another in a room with some air conditioning. Though the government officials were always complaining and picking on the poor about the money, that supported it, had came out of tax dollars.

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They would say it went to nothing and went nowhere. But for how many tax dollars supposedly went the Welcome Center's way this particular facility looked like it hadn't seen a tax dollar since 1973 when it was first opened. But in comparison to many other centers this particular one at the moment had a quite wealthy quite old benefactor that was donating every once in a while. It was lucky that the sweet old couple that donated had horrible descendants and relations because if they didn't they wouldn't be so avid to donate. But due to this they never donated anything that their relations would want or could use or have want to take. So it was always odd and off things like the weekly donuts, or the fully equipped computer lab, or a scratched big screen flat TV, or the hundred VHS movies, a piano that would never tune no matter how hard anyone tried, and a coffee pot that was never stocked with enough coffee. It was a sad sanctuary from the heat or cold that was only opened from 11 Am to 3:30 Pm on weekdays as long as the social service workers didn't have something better to do like holidays.

John walked up the non-handicap accessible stairs into the Center. At the door a psychologist loomed clipboard in hand. As though entering a high security mental health facility he had to sign in with name and social security number. A camera in the far corner of the ceiling had a sign reading camera is on. As signing in the lady asked the same usual rude, interrogating, and offensive questions with the usual porcelain doll smile. As usual he answered in monotone without saying saying much. After she asked the usual, "How do you feel about being homeless and are you an alcoholic?" She ended the interrogation with "and have a nice day." Feeling like a criminal and absolute powerless nobody John walked shoulders and head down to the lounge room. He sunk into a broken down couch and closed his eyes in hope of peace and quiet. He had approximately 28 minutes before the social worker would be holding the every other hour activity. Today was a fun one. Today was Wednesday which meant job placement activities. This only meant one thing the almost homeless would show up in desperate but hopeless need of a job. These people would treat homeless with respect, regard, and generosity. Plus it was always fun because the whole job placement program was just a joke. And, everyone knew it.

Therefore there would be laughing and joking. The panhandlers, the outskirters, the train jumpers, and the pick pockets would appear for hopes of a cigarette, change, or anything an almost homeless could spare. Plus it was always a kick to have a chance to harass the better off that volunteered for college credits. One particular hobo, Miner Jim Joe Who-Dont-Know, he would appear out of nowhere just so as not to miss it. Looking like he hadn't taken a bath for the last decade because he hadn't taken a bath for the last decade he would make the ten to fifteen mile hike out of whatever hole on whatever river he thought might have gold on it and he with his vulgar-smells-like-sewage stench he would make a wonderfully honest statement. Sitting near, shaking hands, talking, and hugging any well-to-do that volunteered he would show how true of a humanitarian they were.

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