

Testament

Richard W. Kelly

Testament

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Testament Sample

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The Daily Examiner

Last night there was a double murder during a possible robbery at a gas station on Melor Avenue. Two male victims were fatally shot. The clerk of the establishment was missing upon the arrival of law enforcement. The police claim to have a lead on the possible killer.

Thomas Year 0 Day 0

Buzzing sounds filled the air. Thomas rolled over in his queen-sized bed, flinging his hand in the process. His palm slammed down on the alarm clock, silencing his room for the next few minutes thanks to the snooze button. In the back of his head, he knew he had to get up, but it was no use. Responsibility was not going to win out over comfort. Instead, he snuggled his head against his time-flattened pillow. If it were not for the garbage truck slamming his apartment's dumpster into the ground, Thomas may not have got up at all that day. Instead, he started on a path that would change the world.

The loud bang of the dumpster caused Thomas to eject himself from his comfortable cuddle to a stiff, upright position. The shock left him out of breath and slightly nervous in his own darkened bedroom. He got to his knees

so he could crawl out of bed. His dark hair hung in his face, leaving a partially obscured view.

He scuttled off the plush mattress to a standing position on the floor. The dirt ingrained in his typical apartment brown carpet pressed against his feet, reminding him of just how high class he was not. Thomas reached down and swiped his work shirt and black denim pants from the sullied floor while forcing his mind to come to grips with the fact that he was going to have to go to work.

He peeked around the corner into the bathroom. A shower should have been necessary, but he kept walking. His refusal to bathe was not driven by the mold on the walls, the lack of soap, or the already-dripping faucet. It was pure laziness of not wanting to shower.

Thomas pulled his shirt over his head as he walked into the kitchen. The roaches scattered as the cabinet opened and he blindly reached in for his puffed rice cereal. The bright white refrigerator stood out in the kitchen. It was the only thing in the room that did not look like it had been blasted with dirt. His former fridge had gone out months ago and the landlord had finally replaced it last week.

He pulled open the door of the new white machine and yanked out the milk. With a quick glance, he noticed it was two weeks past the expiration and tossed the whole carton into the sink. The slime in the unclean bowl caused the milk carton to slide around as if it were a basketball rolling around the edge of the hoop.

Thomas reached his hand into the cereal box and

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pulled out his breakfast. With his free hand, he maneuvered his pants up his legs, unfortunately, dropping some rice puffs on the floor, adding to the filth of the apartment. The bare walls watched as Thomas slipped his shoes on, finished his handful of cereal, and headed toward the door to walk to work. As his hand grasped the cold brass doorknob, a buzzing suddenly came from his bedroom.

Thomas sprinted the six feet back into his room to turn off his alarm clock. As he slid the switch to the left, a small shimmer from the barrel of his pistol caught his eye. The gun was quickly tucked into his waistband. Almost forgot my bodyguard, he thought. It was the only attention he paid the weapon at the time, even though it would change his day ... and his life. He patted his pockets to make sure he did not forget anything else: keys, gum, money, wallet. Everything was ready.

The late-afternoon sun nearly blinded Thomas as he walked out of his cave of a dwelling. Working nights led him to believe blacking out all his windows was a necessity, but in reality, it did nothing more than help him sleep through his alarm. He walked out of the parking lot of his complex and onto the sidewalk. The familiar scent of exhaust wafted by Thomas as he robotically began to make his two-mile walk to work.

As usual, he passed by a couple of bums, a lot of graffiti, and a few morally questionable activities, but these images did not even catch his eye. His mind skipped over the decay of the city because his daily routine of walking to work

was a time to reminisce. He was otherwise rarely self-reflective, but there was something about walking around town by himself that just forced his mind to wander to the familiar.

He was ten years out of high school and this was not where he had pictured himself. Back then, it was nothing but ideas of success. He thought he might even own a business one day, getting up day after day, drumming up clients like his father. This type of dream would have required a lot of work on his part over the previous decade and he was not that dedicated.

He only lasted one semester in junior college. The temptations were too much. How could he force himself to go off to class every day when he did not have to? If he could have seen his punctuality issues in awaking for his current job, he would have known the foregone conclusion. He often wondered if he should return to higher education, but he always shot the thought down before it got too far. It was not that he did not want a better life. It was that he was a lazy man who was afraid of failure.

“Don’t walk” sign. Thomas leaned up against the traffic light, still squinting from the now-fading sunlight. Why can’t it always be midnight? Thomas thought as the walk sign flickered. He checked to see if any cars were coming, as that side of town had a tendency to not adhere to traffic laws. He clicked his heels on the uneven asphalt that covered the road as he journeyed toward his place of employment.

Upon his return to the sidewalk, he passed by a

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woman dragging her small son. The boy was taking wobbling steps while his mother held his hand straight above his head, barely allowing him to reach the litter-covered ground with each short stride.

He wondered if there had ever been a time when his parents helped him along in such a way. The only memories he had of his parents were when he dropped out of college, there was a lot of disappointment, shouting, and ultimatums. He understood it was his own fault and he needed to “grow up,” as they say, but he was holding a grudge he could not let go. He felt there was an indoctrination of his mind from a small age. He construed his parents’ constant encouragement as a forced destiny to attend a university and earn a degree. This morbid view of the love and support he received was just the beginning of his twisted self-image as the black sheep of the family.

In reality, his parents, just like all parents, were proud of him. They wished he had finished his schooling, but there was no chance that they would ever be ashamed of their son. They truly felt that he was lost. That they somehow misguided him, but they loved him, of that there was no doubt. They made mistakes.

The day he told them he was no longer attending school, there were comparisons to his brothers, there was some shouting, and worst of all, there was an empty threat. Unfortunately, Thomas misread that threat and he left. It was the end of that relationship. The lack of the nurturing environment needed to help him grow into the logical mind-

set was a fatal blow to their family unit.

Thomas walked by the topless club that he frequented. The neon lights buzzed slightly as he walked past, breaking his concentration on his parents. As he passed by the establishment, he wondered if he would ever think of his parents if it were not for the daily walks to work.

He looked back over his shoulder to get a last look at the club. The closest people in his life over the last couple of years were his regular dancers. Other than them, his television was the only other thing that had any glimpse into Thomas's life. His lack of friends and lack of female companionship made the topless club an ideal hangout for the young man. That was his first reason for going.

The obsession eventually grew into Thomas's habits, as did everything he fixated his mind on. There was an odd addiction mentality that flowed through the young man, every activity he enjoyed would become a recurring endeavor. Just hammer the same thing until he eventually lost interest. It had been this way from his life as a small child, collecting baseball cards, playing video games, watching TV. It, of course, hardened into a more devastating habit as he aged, allowing him to be exploited by strippers, alcohol, and the casino's when he came into a state that housed some.

Over halfway to work, he thought about some of the dancers he had met there over the years. Desire, Chastity, Pleasure, Peach ... He was sure they were all on to bigger and better things by now. Would they even remember him at this point? He shook the thought from his head. He did not want

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to deal with the reality that he was nothing more than a paycheck to those girls. At least he was not losing his money to that wannabe bordello any more.

There was a loud echoing bang that came from behind Thomas. Fearing it was a gunshot he turned back while ducking behind a mailbox. He had his hand under his shirt, gripping the handle of his pistol, ready to draw the weapon if need be. His respiratory rate had begun to quicken, and his eyes were darting back and forth looking for the life-altering event. There was no sign of anything. The left side of the street was completely empty and the right side consisted of a couple of squirrels playing with the garbage debris, the typical infestation of the sidewalks.

Assuming it was a car backfire, he resumed his walk to work. These types of reaction were par for the area he lived in. Although it was a concern he dealt with on a normal occasion and he should have been used to it, he could not keep the possibility of a gunshot out of his head. The security policy in waistband always helped him feel safe, but the fact that it was illegal for him to possess always left him on edge. But, living on the bad side of town made owning the gun a better bet than not.

Thomas always said, "It's better to be alive in prison than dead and law-abiding." Of course, he could have bought it legally and registered himself with the authorities, but spending that kind of cash would have bankrupted him for months and caused him more work than he cared to contend with.

He rounded the final corner of his journey. The sun now setting created a bright haze over the gas station where Thomas worked. The gas pumps painted with graffiti and clad in cracked glass appeared to wave in the heat, looking as though they were part of a dying sauna. The location of the store always perplexed Thomas. It was on a minor street hidden by two large buildings on either side of it. It was set far enough back from the street itself that you had to know it was there or you would always pass it on the first go.

He went inside and exchanged pleasantries with the outgoing employee, switching the cash drawers and speaking about the issues of the day. Once the other employee was gone, Thomas removed his gun from his waistband and placed it under the counter where he had access to it at all times.

His shift was to consist of checking people out, cleaning the store, and helping customers in any way they needed. For the most part, Thomas only operated the cash register. He was not concerned with customer satisfaction or the cleanliness of the store itself. In fact, he was constantly playing two games in his head.

The first was a counting game where he would see how many times a customer would ask for help before they decided he was either deaf or rude. This game commonly caused many people to walk out without buying anything, but that never weighed on Thomas's decision to play.

The second was a guessing game that centered on trying to see how much dust and dirt could collect around

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each customer. He had a person at one point that literally had a dust bunny that covered his entire shoe. This game almost felt like watching art.

Each person would walk into the store, causing a disruption in the dirt colony on the floor. A little tornado of grime would circle their feet as they moved to a shelf to look for their specific item. As they would pick up different products, dust would fall off them and onto the floor, intermingling with the muck already there.

Seeing these little drops fall into a bigger ocean of dirt was very serene and always left Thomas pondering the bigger picture. It was almost a metaphor for his life and how each disturbing issue would build, creating who he was, his own ocean of filth.

This is how he spent his night, hour after hour of painful, slow monotony until two o'clock in the morning. It had been over ten minutes since Thomas had a customer come in the store. He was lost in nonthought staring, gazing aimlessly at the Styrofoam-tiled drop ceiling. Just when he was about to start counting the miniature holes in each tile, a couple of men cautiously sauntered into the store.

Richard W. Kelly

The Daily Examiner

After the early shooting Thursday morning, the attendant for the local gas station is still missing. The situation has been filed as a missing person's case. Although the police will not comment, the aforementioned missing person may be a suspect in the shooting.

Thomas Year 0 Day 1 AV

Thomas lost his focus on the insignificant ceiling and watched the men as they quickly went to the back of the store. Their behavior was off-putting, to say the least. One of the men, tall and lanky, was grabbing things off the shelf while staring out the window. His dark eyes were constantly darting left and right, as if he were on the lookout for something while his dirty-blond hair swayed in the opposite direction of his eyes in large chunks held together by the man's obvious refusal to wash it. The other man was much shorter than his partner or Thomas. He sported a brown leather biker jacket and enough tattoos to warrant a commission for the advertising he gave the artist. He stared directly at Thomas, not trying to hide his gaze in any way.

This put Thomas on high alert. Standing behind the counter, he put his hand on his gun, just in case. Sweat beaded

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over his brow as his pointer finger caressed the trigger of his weapon. After a short amount of time, the tall man, still looking out the window, was holding a large amount of potato chips, tampons, and motor oil. It was obvious he had no idea what had ended up in his arms. The short man, still staring at Thomas, tapped the tall man on the arm and began swiftly walking toward the cash register.

As the men were moving toward Thomas, his brain started working faster than his body could handle. He grasped the handle of the firearm tightly as he recalled his list of reasons why it was safe to work at a gas station overnight. All of those reasons he created months ago seemed to not be sensible now, realizing his current situation. As the two men approached, he felt worried and lonely.

The short man having reached the counter shouted at Thomas, "Give me all the money in the register!"

Thomas was in shock. He could not move. His body stood there frozen with one hand beneath the counter holding onto his weapon, the other flat on the counter not moving toward the money like the robbers desired. The tall man, still walking toward the counter, said with an odd Southern accent, "Look at his arm. He's hittin' an alarm, or he's got a gun."

Thomas's body went into automatic pilot. The leather-clad intruder started to pull out a weapon of his own, while Thomas's trigger finger instinctively pulled back. It was an odd feeling. Thomas pulled the trigger three times in short succession, firing bullets through the counter itself. The

man's body twisted and turned as the bullets made plywood splinters chaotically fly through the air just before they traveled through his body. The gangly man fumbled with his gun as he began to shoot before he had aimed in Thomas's direction.

It could have been the fear of being shot or the realization that he may have just killed someone, but Thomas collapsed to the ground, still clinging to his weapon. He landed hard on the floor behind the counter with his head slamming into the concrete. In the fetal position, his head bounced up and then hit the ground a second time in rebound from the hard fall. The jarring of his brain inside his skull caused the light in the room to hurt his eyes momentarily, but he was relieved to be alive, until he noticed the tall man standing over him, pointing his gun in Thomas's face.

The tall man shook slightly. The gun gently clicked as his hand shivered side to side. They both looked back at the other robber shot dead, motionless on the ground. Slowly, they moved their gazes back toward each other.

The living robber aimed his gun at Thomas's head and tried to swallow the massive amount of saliva that was building up in his mouth. His tongue scraped across his dry lips. As soon as Thomas saw the man's index finger extend and start to pull back, his body returned to autopilot.

His life did not flash before his eyes. There was no intimidation from the gun being aimed at his head, just mechanical reactions to a traumatic experience. Before the awkward man could build the gall to avenge the death of his

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partner, Thomas twisted his hand to point his weapon upward and pulled the trigger twice. His body had every intention of shooting again, but the splatter of blood on his face disturbed his plans.

There was a dull thump as the robber fell backwards onto the dirty floor and Thomas went limp. He lay there quiet and still for an inordinate amount of time. The realization that he had just taken two lives was a revelation that was lingering around the corner, then there was nothing but relief in that room. The adrenaline in his body seemed to ooze out of his ears, down the side of his head, and all over the floor.

The idea of calling 911 crossed his mind, but he could barely force himself to think, much less move his body. Staring up at the ceiling, Thomas realized how relaxing the world could be. Moments before, there was pandemonium in his place of work, but after the necessary events transpired, there was a perfect calm. The only motion in the entire building was his heartbeat.

He could have remained there relaxed forever, but a loud bang disrupted the ambiance as the front door forcibly flew open, slamming into the counter. Thomas could feel the presence of something dark, a sinister yet stealthy being which glided throughout the store. It stopped at Thomas's feet. The creature moved gracefully as it lightly traced his arm with its fingers. Still looking straight ahead at the ceiling, Thomas found himself unable to breathe. Panic was setting in and it left him immobile, frozen in terror.

The dark and silky hair of the thing swayed into

Thomas's view. It was the smoothest and finest looking mane he had ever seen, conjuring up memories of chinchillas and rabbits he had as a child. Then unexpectedly, a severe pain immediately followed the image.

His neck was being crushed by something razor sharp. Thomas could feel his esophagus collapsing under the pressure of what his mind rationalized to be a bear trap. The anguish snapped him out of his statuesque state, gasping for air and shooting to a sit.

He tried to inhale. It did nothing but force pressure in his chest, which was trying to collapse in on itself from the closed airway in his gullet. The being jumped back so dramatically that it hit the ceiling, its head crashing through a Styrofoam panel. Its eyes focused on Thomas and infected the rest of his face with a look of sheer panic.

Thomas, not being overly observant while he was convinced of his impending death, only got a quick glimpse of his attacker. It was a tall, slender man who was nearly as pale as the fluorescent lights illuminating the store. The thing that would have haunted Thomas's dreams was the fact that the man had a mouth full of blood, his blood, which was wide open in its frightened capacity while Thomas continued to struggle for air.

The man quickly dashed out of the store and out into the street, leaving Thomas to suffer.

It was at that moment Thomas wished for death. He was losing consciousness from lack of oxygen and his throat was in unbearable pain. He could feel the warmth of his blood

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pouring out his neck and onto his shirt, leaving him bathing in his own life-source. His eyes darted left and right, looking for something to stop the pain, but he had no idea what to do. He could not speak, he could not breathe, he could barely move.

The fear surged a second wind of energy he used to look down at his body. Lying flat on the floor, he could see the color fading from his skin. The sight brought horror to his mind as he could not fathom he was losing blood that quickly.

He knew it must be his imagination, but he could hear a sizzling sound as his pigment fled his skin. He focused on his hands, watching as a release of his tincture took place as if a volume of water were slowly making its way toward his fingertips. As soon as his hands were a bloodless pale, he felt the burning move into his eyes.

He shoved his palms into his eye sockets, trying to push the pain back down the ocular nerves. All sounds around him were intensifying. The wounds in his neck began to throb. The pulsation of his injuries became so intense that the skin felt as though it were stretching and tightening around his neck.

Realizing how long it had been since he could breathe, he tried to force some air through his lungs. It was to no avail, but for some reason, he did not feel as though it were a necessity anymore. His body seemed to function and grow slightly stronger, even without oxygen. He subliminally questioned his sanity, assuming the lack of air was driving him

off the deep end and into a pool of hallucination and irrationality.

His body started to go cold, but as his body heat evaporated, he felt his liveliness return. In fear of his physical injuries, he did not want to move, but all of his muscles tensed up, ready for action.

There comes a point in many people's lives where they feel they have left reality. This experience was no different. Lost somewhere between sleep and consciousness, his entire body was numb, leaving his pain past tense. Breathing had become a phantom of his brain. He knew he had to be inhaling, but there was no proof that it was happening.

Reaching for his throat, trying to find something to ground him in reality, he found no wounds. His lack of injury was incomprehensible. He was just bit in the throat by some vicious being and moments later, he was sitting on the floor with no pain, no bleeding, and no injuries.

His mind retreated and let him fall into a fantasy, a daydream. There was nothing to bring him back. His body sat on the floor of the gas station while his mind trekked through his life. He tried to force the life flashing before his eyes to happen. He remembered his childhood, his romances, his family. He attempted everything to allow himself to pass on. He craved his ascension to the afterlife, but all he got was tunnel vision and a washing out of colors as his eyes seemed to become more susceptible to the light.

Forcing himself to move, he reached a kneeling

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position, trying to get to his feet. Having received such a shock to his psyche, he did not know if he was in the real world or a dream state, but his perception of the world was suddenly much more vibrant. The dark and dingy place that he called work had new life inside of it. The grays of the floor seemed to dance with the yellows of the counters almost visibly mixing before his eyes. It was a psychedelic animation that seemed to belong in an acid trip. He quickly turned his head to the side and nearly fell to the ground as the earthy tones of the sandwiches attacked his vision like a spotlight in the face.

Looking down, Thomas saw the two corpses of his previous attackers lying motionless on the floor, reminding him of the possibility that he may have lost his mind. Could he possibly have murdered the two men and envisioned the being attacking him? Had the act of taking a life sent him over the edge and forced him to become a self-delusional killer?

Still staring off at the dead bodies, he noticed that his hand was clutching the murder weapon. There was no chance he was getting out of this one, not in the liberal town he lived in, there murder was murder. He knew he was in possession of an illegal firearm. He stared down at the dead robbers, feeling a lump build in his throat. It was a lump of fear, of sorrow, of sadness for what he had been forced to give up. His gaze, trained on the dead men, kept his entire body in check until the door opened.

Thomas immediately looked up to see a man running frantically down the street away from the gas station. He had

obviously seen the two dead robbers and Thomas standing over them with his gun. Did he flee for his life or to fetch the police? Thomas may not have the luxury of turning himself in anymore. He could be reported before he could convince himself to even lift the phone and call the authorities.

He walked over to the register and pressed three of the glossy buttons to get the cash drawer open. All the money not in the safe went into his pockets, along with the gun. He leapt over the counter and went out the door into the city. He had no idea where he was going, but he knew he needed to run if he did not want to spend the rest of his life behind bars. He began sprinting full speed down the street and somehow began to relax as he watched the scenery blend together as the colors in his sight swirled around to make one blob of color.

It was a tunnel of colors. The pallet of the world mingled with itself, creating a rainbow-painted tube that Thomas was sprinting through. He was running down the street, taking corners at full speed, dodging the occasional pedestrian. There was nothing behind him that could convince him to go back to. There was a new life in front of him that he was rushing to reach. Behind him were his fears, his life as he had never wanted it to develop. All of his failures and broken dreams lingered back there and he had no intention to return.

His failure at education, his family failures, his career failures, his romantic failures, even his social failures were all topped off by the shooting of the two intruders at the gas

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station where he worked. The road in front of him was unknown and frightening, but the two dead bodies made sure he did not turn back. His mind clawed at ideas of what would happen if he were caught as his feet continued to race down the sidewalks of his hometown, ignoring his brain's temptations to stop. Would he go to jail? Would he be put to death? There would be no mercy if he were found. He was not the upper crust of society and would not be given a get-out-of-jail-free card.

Scenarios began to play out in his head as he turned a corner at full speed. Instantly, he stopped dead in his tracks, worried that the life behind him and the life in front of him may be one and the same. The blurring of his tunnel vision faded as the red brick buildings all came back into focus with a police car in the center of his view. Thankful that the cops had not looked his direction, he glanced to both sides in desperation for a place to hide.

The typical scene of urban society at four in the morning left little to conceal his person. He turned back around, facing the alley that he had just run down and slowly walked back toward the shadows in a valiant attempt at remaining inconspicuous.

It was nerve-racking for him to stroll back away from the police. Without being able to see them, he did not know if he was getting away. Had they found out about his murders yet? Were they watching him? All he could hope for was that it had not been reported yet. They would find out, there was no doubt about it. He did not even take the time to cover up

his prints or mask his identity in any way. He had just run.

Once he knew he was out of the streetlights, he took off running again. He restricted himself to the back alleys. The direct routes of the major roads were not worth the risk of getting caught, especially when he had no destination. Moving faster than he ever thought possible, he bounded over dumpsters, animals, and other obstacles in his path. Having spent his entire life in the city, he knew every nook and cranny like the back of his hand. It took no thought, he just ducked in between buildings, down small streets, and through people's yards, not sure of where he was headed.

Dashing down a familiar road he thought he heard something chasing him. He tried to turn his head to look behind him, but his speed forced him to return his concentration forward. The fear that there might be an officer hunting him down, determined to put him behind bars fogged his judgment. He turned into an apartment parking lot and weaved through the parked cars, hoping to lose whoever was following.

Fence. He was trapped in a corner of the lot. He turned back and still did not see anyone or anything, just reigniting his fear that he may be losing his mind. There were a lot of cars nicely parked in the grid fashion the paint suggested in front of him and a fifteen-foot fence behind him. The sounds of the city seemed to fill his ears, screaming, honking, screeching, and sirens were all very audible to him. It was the sirens that made him resume his sprint.

He turned toward the massive fence and jumped

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straight up, hoping against hope that he might be able to reach the top. His muscles contracted tighter than his body had ever felt as he pushed off the ground with a massive force from his calves. He startled himself as his feet cleared the fence and he fell the fifteen feet to the cement on the other side. He hit the ground hard, landing on a knee, feeling an immediate swelling of the joint. It could have been the adrenaline, but there was no pain from the landing, no strain from the jump, and no time to ponder these issues. He was off at full speed again.

He had been running for longer than he could keep track of when he realized there was no fatigue. He was as calm and relaxed as he would be after a long night's sleep. He was not panting, his pulse was not pounding, and he still had it in him to keep going. It was similar to a dream, when he would realize after hours of sleep that his dreams were impossible and that he was not in reality. But this time, he could not awake. He was conscious and this was not a delusion.

Time stood still as Thomas darted all over town. He eventually stopped at the center of the town square before the humongous yet beautifully built courthouse that looked down over the rest of the buildings in the square. Although he could not remember the connection he made, it was the sight of that building that brought him to the realization that he had been attacked by something inhuman. He could not put his finger on what it was, but he knew that it was not natural. Could it have been supernatural? A ghost? A god? A

monster? A demon? There was no telling, but whatever it had been, it was having strange effects on his body.

Though he was not tired, he knew that he had expended an insurmountable amount of energy and he must need food. Turning away from the courthouse, he scanned the businesses in the square, hoping for a fast-food restaurant with an all-night dining room. The row of businesses in front of Thomas were all closed, as were the ones to his right, but a light was on in a burger joint to his left. Instinctively putting one foot in front of the other, his mind began to worry that he looked like he had been running from the police. He may not have felt worn-out, but his appearance might show it.

The door flung open with the slightest push from Thomas and the unbearably bright lights accompanied with the off-white and yellow décor reminded him of his gas station. There was the same feel of human desperation, the same horror of the real world, a personified version of everything he hated about his own life. On top of the depravity of the business itself was a stench of burning animal flesh that nearly nauseated Thomas.

Fearing that he looked like a fugitive on the run, Thomas turned right immediately upon entering the building to make a beeline to the restrooms. Throwing open the bathroom door, he was welcomed by a mirror with an odd reflection. He could tell he was looking at an image of himself, but it looked as though he were half-invisible. He could almost see through his body to the tiles on the wall. He was paler than he had ever thought a person could be, his

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eyes having lost all of their pigment, his hair stringy yet sleek. His veins were all beginning to become more visible through his skin, and the splatter of the robber's blood was still sprayed across his face.

He turned on the water and quickly rinsed his face, but his reflection remained cadaverous. He put his hands on the wet granite counter, trying to gather his bearings. Leaning forward, staring blankly into the sink, he again questioned his sanity. It was too much. Everything that night had become too weird, too surreal. No matter what thought he had, nothing made sense. Was he comatose and this was all a dream as he lay on the floor of the gas station? Maybe he had been drugged sometime that day and he was running around making a fool of himself while living a delusion. He could not convince himself of any scenario. The only thing he knew for sure was the stench of burning flesh lingered in the bathroom also.

He shook his head to refocus on the mission he had set for himself. Emerging from the bathroom, he looked over at the counter and began to stare at the girl behind it. Tall and slender, the girl looked back at Thomas. Her physical features were almost blank to him, but there was a bright glow and slight pulsation all around her body. He stared at her, seeing energy palpitate throughout her veins, looking like nothing he had seen before. It created a hazy movement similar to heat on a highway in the desert.

As he approached the counter, her features became clearer, but looking over her soft skin, his mind forcibly

started to think about the girl's mood and emotions. Instinctively, he knew that she was intrigued by him, his look, his movements, and his intensity, which was focused solely on her at that moment.

The young girl, excited to speak to the mysterious customer, looked up at his face and asked what he would like to order. A smile shone through on her face as Thomas mentioned her beauty in contrast to the darkness of night. He ordered a hamburger after a couple of flirtatious smiles and comments. The girl was flustered but managed to get his burger from the back and gave it to him while she blushed from his suave demeanor.

He took the burger and walked to an open chair. He could not figure out what had come over him. He did not normally have the confidence to flirt with girls he did not know. It was a surprise he could be so charming. Her reaction reminded him of the strip club with the dancers clamoring around him as if he were their knight in shining armor. Of course, he always knew it was the money, but not with this girl. She could not have cared less if he were spending money at the burger joint.

Thomas looked down at the hamburger he had ordered and it appeared to be one of the least appetizing meals he had ever placed in front of himself. It was an experience he had never felt before. There were times in the past when meat was unappealing when he dwelled on it being a former mammal, there were times when things were repulsive because he just was not in the mood, but this time,

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it was as if someone had served him mud. Not as if he were uninterested, but almost as if it were not even food. He forced a few bites, but the majority of the burger joined the rest of the restaurant's waste in the garbage can.

He gave a quick wave and wink to the girl behind the counter as he walked back out into the city. In the open air, he looked up. He was not looking at buildings or people, he was looking at the night itself. There was a majestic quality that had previously gone unnoticed. The moon sat guard over the millions of stars throughout the sky as if it were a sheepdog watching over the flock. Seeing the contrast of distant objects pressed against the velvety black of night created a feeling of captivation within Thomas's soul. It was only the cool night breeze that helped drift Thomas's attention away from the infinite space of the universe back to the world he was standing upon.

Looking back to Earth, he noticed a few people wandering the streets at the late hour he was out. But just like with the girl behind the counter, he did not see specific features. Instead, he saw incredible glows and energy flowing through their veins. The pulsations of each different person showed the amazing dance of nature, the impossibility of everyone living in this world with overly complex biological systems.

As each person came closer to Thomas's location, he saw more of their personal glow. He could see their mood and sense their emotions. Bright blues, reds, and yellows bombarded his vision while the thoughts and worries of those

people invaded his mind. He heard the screams and pleas of people he did not know, desiring everything from sexual gratification to large sums of money. He was not creating these thoughts, they were invading his mind.

Just like the night sky, his people-watching activity was quickly becoming a fascination. He lost track of time as he stared at passersby throughout the night, but he did notice the sun coming up. The light was barely peeking over the buildings when he felt a strange terror. The small amounts of light caused Thomas's vision to blend into a big pool of colors. His focus fell out of his control and his body was beginning to have trouble staying upright. He was weakening at an astonishing rate, feeling as if he had not slept in days and his body would not have it any more.

Thomas stumbled across the street and into the presence of the courthouse. As he stepped into the shade of the massive building, he began to feel a slight bit better. Feeling the tiny bit of relief, he collapsed on the lawn before the courthouse. However, it was only a temporary reprieve. As the sunlight got brighter, Thomas had more trouble seeing and began to feel vomit rise in his throat. The light appeared to attack all of his physical capacities as he began to feel a hint of pain on his skin.

He stood up and fumbled his way down the lane, looking for a place to rest. Being so early in the morning, nothing had opened yet. He began to head toward the burger place that he went to earlier that night, but before he could get to the door, he collapsed in the street, a burning rising up

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from the inside of his body. If it were not for the slanted roads and the rain gutter he slid into, he may have lay there all day in the punishing light. He slammed face-first into the concrete floor of the rain gutter, but he could already tell the pain was subsiding a bit.

The thud echoed throughout the modern-day bunker as Thomas's skull bounced off the paved floor. It was a relief to land in the shade, credit due to the engineer who designed the runoff-gutter system. The tension in his muscles relaxed as the cool morning breeze made its way into the small lateral portal from the outside world, whirling in the small room, creating invisible cyclones and other psychedelic patterns as it danced around the floor and across Thomas's limp, slowly rejuvenating body.

He looked to both sides, perusing his surroundings, realizing that he again felt no pain, an experience he did not oppose, realizing how hard he had landed.

The cold, uninviting surroundings of the sewer were intriguing to Thomas. It was nothing more than a hundred-twenty-five-cubic foot box. The man-made rock had no decorations excepting the small trace of moisture that had stained the wall below the opening which led out of the curb on the adjacent street.

He refused to move, not for relaxation, but to heal his body mostly from the sun moments before. He stared up at the entrance he fell from, paying no attention to the two tunnels that led out of the cube near his head and feet. His mind revolted at every inkling of movement. Whether his

body wanted to move or not, his brain was reacting as if he were on his deathbed. Every thought was draining energy and he was going to remain motionless until it was no longer a possibility.

As he lay in corpse pose, his senses honed in on the rest of the particulars of his current location. The walls were crawling with miniscule insects, which he assumed to be gnats and fleas. It was a constant moving portrait of a bug metropolis as they weaved around each other in an attempt to scurry to the next driest spot on the wall. Although this image transfixed Thomas's eyes for some time, the potency of the sewer's aroma quietly grew stronger and stronger until Thomas no longer had the ability to ignore it. It was familiar yet uninvited as it conjured up memories of bathroom trauma and rotten fruits found months later in his refrigerator. To his dismay, the longer he lay in the funk, the more it seeped into his other senses, tasting and almost feeling the touch of the sickening scent.

He found himself staring at his hands, trying to bounce the focus of the stench out of his psyche. It was no use. No matter what he focused on, his newly hardened fingernails, oddly sharpened teeth, and even his unusually slick hair could not derail his nose. Still lying on the floor, he resolved his annoyance with the idea that the stench was better than the sunlight, at least he was not in pain.

Turning his attention back to the bugs on the wall, he noticed that he could hear water running from inside the tube he was adjacent to. Birds chirped from up above. Placing his

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hands flat on the ground at his sides, he scraped his right middle finger across the cold, unforgiving concrete floor of the gutter, sounding as though it were a chalkboard. It gave a tingle to every vertebrae of his spine. Every sound was becoming so intense he convinced himself he was listening to the microscopic bugs' legs pushing off the walls of his makeshift bed.

It was hours before Thomas would move, his mind obsessed with his sudden keen hearing abilities. Listening to the sounds of dust bounce along the floor was washed away as a car drove by, forcing his auditory control to leave the detailed view it was using and return to the macro-audio world he had previously been accustomed to. Had it not been for the rotation of the Earth, Thomas might have spent eternity where he was, but as soon as the sunlight crept onto his shin, he was up and moving.

He spent no time conversing with himself on which way to move. He, instead, took the tunnel nearest his head and crawled into the darkness away from the burn of the sunlight. The short apex of the tunnels forced Thomas to remain on his hands and knees as he sloshed the sewage water through the steel-ribbed tubes. He was being drawn, unaware, to something down in the sewer's depths.

Every time Thomas scooted his body farther into the dark chasm, the sounds of rats scampering through the rotting sewage became more and more prevalent. Every so often he would catch a glimpse of one of the rodents frantically clawing at the iron tube, trying to escape from the

path of the odd invader to their world. All the rats and an occasional opossum seemed to be fearful of Thomas and utilized all of their energies trying to scatter.

Thomas continued crawling down the tube as it drove him farther and farther away from his entrance. He looked back to see where he came from and realized that the room was no longer in sight. He was shocked to realize there was absolutely no light visible in the tunnel, yet, his sight remained. In fact, he thought he had better vision in the darkness than he did out in the sun where everything was left an oozing blob of colors.

He kept crawling, mechanical movements, no intelligent thought, dripping in sewage. It was hours of wallowing in filth with no real purpose; he had no destination to end his journey. Not tired, he felt he must keep moving. It did not take long before he realized that he was in an underground grid of the city. Every five minutes or so he came across a small room with either a manhole directly above him or a room similar to the one he fell into with the runoff entrance.

His muscles had not pulled back in fatigue as he continued to crawl through the sewers, utilizing more than half of his day. By this time, he could not escape the funk of the caverns. It had seeped into his skin, allowing the terrible smell to waft straight through him as he journeyed on. With perfect vision, Thomas looked over his shoulder to see nothing but the perfectly clear dark path from whence he had come. It threw him off. He had been expecting all day to find

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someone following behind. He constantly heard another person on his trail, but the stranger seemed to be invisible or only in his mind.

As he turned back from looking for his nonexistent stalker, Thomas felt an odd pressure on his kneecap. His leg instinctively paused in midair, waiting for an examination before continuing his crawl. Balanced on his left shin, he put his right foot flat on the slimy sewer floor. Pulling his chin into his neck, he looked down at his knee to see a foreign object which had broken the skin and lodged itself into the flesh between his kneecap and the joint.

Horror rushed through his veins as images of amputation due to tetanus filled his brain. He looked closer at the object and noticed it was an old, rusted nail, now dripping with the greenish sludge that flowed slowly throughout the sewage system. His right hand immediately flew up to his leg to swipe the nail from its captor. It took the force of a toddler to remove the rusty splinter. The severity of the injury was quickly apparent as the kneecap moved an inch or so to pop back into its rightful place. The sight of such a disturbing maneuver sent chills through Thomas's body, but it was the fact that he was in no physical discomfort that forced him to reexamine the wound.

Upon closer inspection, he could see the inside of his knee from the large opening left by the nail. There was no blood. The injury looked as if it had been inflicted on an embalmed cadaver. No life force was present, no color, nothing but the mechanics of the human body with a small

amount of clear liquid dripping from the wound.

Suddenly, a light splash came from behind Thomas. He swiveled his head around fast enough to cause head trauma, but there was no one there. Confused and slightly unnerved, he turned his attention back to his knee to find the gash had completely healed over. Not even a scar.

His voyage through the sewers was nearly over, as within minutes he came into a new room. Unlike the majority of the rooms he found, this one was not so much a grid point as it was a center point. Coming out of the tubes he had been bent over in all day, he stepped down into a deeper pool of the sewer mire.

Now thigh deep in the disgusting concoction, he could stand entirely erect and survey the area. It was the same concrete material making the room itself, but it was a circular space filled with the same stench, the same bugs, and same rodents he been dealing with his whole adventure. Ten tunnels lined the wall surrounding the center of the room which housed an iron ladder that led up to a manhole. The manhole had a singular hole, allowing the light of the day to shine down upon the ocean of waste in a pinpoint spotlight.

Thomas perused the room, shaking the gunk from his clothes, feeling as though he were not the only person in that room and knowing it wasn't the rats he was sensing. He stood there in a frozen state, trying to avoid the sewage as much as possible while allowing the ideas of his murders to infest his mind. He reflected on the fact that he was now a murderer. A fugitive running from the police for a crime he felt he was

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justified in committing.

It was starting to hurt his head as he dwelled on those ideas for hours, letting the arguments in his head fight back and forth, trying to accept his murderous reality while still attempting to put a realistic spin on his new unearthly powers. His eyes were focused on the small bit of light coming down from the roof for the duration of the internal argument.

Hours of the day passed by. Still feeling no weariness except mental fatigue, Thomas noticed the light-spot he had been staring at had vanished. Not wanting to emerge in the sunlight to be greeted with the torture he felt that morning, Thomas waited to see if the spot would return. After all, the sun may have taken temporary shelter behind a cloud, but it did not return. All his fears drifted away. He felt an unfamiliar relief that he could now return to the surface and be free to roam.

The cold rungs of the iron ladder refreshed Thomas's skin, allowing it to dance with small reactions to the temperature change. He pulled himself up the ladder, step after step, pushing his body up into the air. Holding onto the ladder with one hand, he reached the other up and pressed against the manhole cover. The heavy iron disc easily moved out of its place as if it were a plastic Frisbee, revealing the beautiful post-twilight city.

As Thomas got to his feet in the middle of the street, he lifted his head straight up reminiscent of a howling wolf, directing his vision toward the moon. Taking a deep breath, he soaked up the energy emanating from the luminescent

Richard W. Kelly

moon, filling his body with fresh vigor that formerly only accompanied a good night's sleep.

Thomas looked to both sides trying to find an activity to engulf himself in when he suddenly realized... he had not escaped the stench of the sewer. It was now ingrained in him.