

SEVENTH STREET BRIDGE By Terry Knox

Macy read this article that was in a magazine we found with a bunch of other stuff in a box somebody'd stole from somebody and then dumped off alongside the bridge by where we were staying, and after Macy read this article he kind of wasn't the same anymore. It wasn't a big deal kind of thing. He didn't pull a Jeckle and Hyde on me, or anything like that. In fact, unless you'd been living right next to him like I had and spent a lot of time around him with his two dogs, it probably isn't even anything you'd have noticed. Maybe, maybe not. But I did. I noticed. Macy read this article we found in a magazine, and after he read it he wasn't the same anymore. And that's the truth. I don't have any reason to be making this shit up.

The way I first started knowing him was when he started coming around there at the 7th Street underbridge, over by where I had my spot. I mean, he wasn't there to see me, or anything. We didn't know each other yet. I'd never even seen him before that, and neither had any of the other people who were living up under there then, it didn't seem like, even though I wouldn't have listened to anything they'd of had to say about him, anyway, because they were most of them scandalous motherfuckers, excuse my French. I mean, that's why I'd build my place all the hell way away from over there in the first place--just to be by myself and avoid some of the drama of community life over there, although there was a lot of it was always going to find its way over to my side, no matter what I did. Just so you get some kind of idea of the lay of the land. There were ten or twelve of them over against the fence on the other side, underneath the Eastbound lanes. They'd set up their places--I don't know, maybe eight of 'em separate tents and houses, all different sizes and all clustered together all kind of ways with plastic tarps they'd got from the missions tied together and draped over the tops, and there wasn't any street access over there because of the railroad tracks and a fenced-in parking lot for some warehouses, and so it was darker and more private and secluded and whuppty whup. But it meant I ended up having to make my spot over near the fence that's right next to the little street down alongside the bridge, and even though it was under the bridge, it was more out in the open than I would've wanted, and was noisy in the daytime and not very private. I mean, you could drive your car right up to the fence there or even just walk up and stand there and look through it and be able to see my

doorway if you wanted to. Same way I could sit inside my doorway and see you.

Which is more or less the way it happened the first time Macy pulled in against the fence there and parked his van for the night. Him and two dogs with their heads poked out the passenger-side window, a big one and a little one. Not barking, though--which right there by itself was kind of cool. But anyway, the minute he drove up, I was watching him from inside my place. I'm pretty sure he didn't see me, because of how far back inside I was and because it was dark outside except for his headlights and the streetlight down at the corner, right where you first come off the bridge. I never asked him later, even after we'd started knowing each other, if he'd seen me watching that first night, because it'd have sounded like a stupid something to be asking, and I hope this doesn't make me sound like some kind of wack-o, the way I was sitting there in the dark watching him like that. But then, maybe now you'll believe me what I said about how at that point in my life I wasn't looking to make any new friends, and how I really, more than anything else, just wanted to be left the fuck alone.

So really, I got to know him pretty much the same way anybody ever gets to know somebody they're just seeing for the first time: you watch 'em a little bit, without being too conspicuous or anything, you know--until you kind of figure out what they're up to and what do they want. I mean, I'm no expert on how it is everywhere else in the world, and I don't know anybody who is, but around a bridge-type situation like the one over there under 7th Street, everybody is sooner or later going to want something. And you can count on that. Which can get to be a problem if for some reason they think you have that something and that maybe, one way or another, they can get it from you. I'd say that's kind of a pretty good nutshell version of how some of the more serious misunderstandings can occur. Just in general, I mean. But in particular I happen right now to be talking about drugs. And please don't be surprised by that. Because I don't care how many of those romantic stories you grew up hearing about hobo poets riding the rails and singing songs of the road around the campfires in hobo jungles all across this land kind of thing, if somebody is living under a bridge, any bridge any place, more than likely somewhere along the line that hobo poet's been doing some drugs. That's true of me, Macy, those fools over there on the other side, everybody. And I don't have any problem telling you that. But that's not what this story is about.

One of his dogs was a little grey terrier mix of some sort, and the other one was an old black pit bull. And I mean old. And fat, which for some weird reason always makes me feel good to see. And right away, even from where I was sitting the first time I saw her, I could tell there was something wrong with her. I mean, just from the way the guy had to lift her out of the van and set her down real careful there beside the fence and keep holding her for a couple of seconds to steady her before letting go. She wasn't completely blind, but pretty close. And she'd kind of nudge or bump into things, and then stand real still like she was confused or something and was afraid to move. Then this guy sort of poked her with his finger and teased her and poked her again, playing with her, and she wagged her tail and started moving forward a little bit and then stopped and the guy poked her with his finger again and teased her some more and she wagged her tail and moved. Her name was Dixie. She was a good girl.

The guy poking her was Macy.

But not yet he wasn't. Not right away. It took about a week of him showing up around there at night and the two of us giving each other polite head nods through the fence if we'd happen to see each other when he'd let the dogs out to sniff and piss or, you know, whatever. All that time he was just this guy in a van and I was just me. And it might've even stayed that way, at least for a while longer, if it hadn't been for the guy's other dog, the little one, the one called Henry.

I'd cut my opening through the fence kind of out of sight down behind the steps leading up to the bridge, so that you'd have to either be looking down at me from up on the bridge or be watching me from underneath as I came down the steps to really see how I got through the fence to my spot. I mean, it's not like it was some secret-ass big deal or anything. But still, it was pretty well concealed, the way I'd made my cuts and everything, so that the wire didn't get sprung wide apart and didn't leave a noticeable hole there in the city's fence. And since everybody else came in from over there on the other side where they didn't have to crawl through on their hands and knees, it ended up being that nobody but me used my opening.

Except Henry, that is. He found it after the first few nights and was over there at my place in the middle of my shit, checking things out there around my doorway. Then one night he just came through the flap and right on inside where I was

laying on my bed and just kind of stood there looking at me with me looking back at him. That kind of thing. Just looking at each other for, I don't know, maybe fifteen seconds--which is a pretty long time for that kind of thing. Then he just turned around and went back out the way he'd come in. But casually, you understand. It wasn't like he felt he had to leave. He just felt like leaving. I got up and looked out my flap to see if he was maybe getting into something outside there that might hurt him--you never know with dogs--and when I did, I saw this guy looking over at me from where he was standing with Dixie beside the van.

"He bothering you?" he called over to me. It was the first time he'd ever said anything to me, and it took me a quick moment there before I realized he was waiting for me to respond.

"No problem." I waved it off. Henry was by then going back through the fence to the other side. The guy took the palm of his hand and fast-slapped it real loud on the top of the van. It startled Dixie, causing her to jerk her head around and bump her rear end against the fence, and Henry came scooting along the fence-line towards the two of them in a hurry. "You better GET your little ass over here," he said, playing mean. Henry stopped a few feet short of him and stood real still, with his front-legs stiff and his neck-bowed--some kind of terrier fighting stance, I guess, except that his stub tail was fluttering back and forth in a blur of good time. They both stared at each other without moving for a couple of seconds, then the guy, real sudden-like, made a quick, exaggerated hop towards him, and Henry spun around and took off full-speed back down along the fence-line, lowered his butt and skidded to a stop, then sprinted back to where the guy and Dixie were standing. He stopped again right there in exactly the same spot he'd just left. Whatever the game was, they both knew how to play it.

"You sure?" the guy called over again. "Because the little fucker will get into things, if you don't watch him."

It's hard to explain this, because I'll agree with you if you say it really doesn't sound like much of a conversation. And it wasn't. But what you've got to understand about Macy is that there was just something so easy and comfortable about the way he said things--anything, really--I mean, it would come out just so simple and matter-of-fact, you just knew he meant what he was saying, and was enjoying himself saying it, but at the same time he was in a way apologizing without making a whole big deal out of it.

"Don't worry about it," I said back to him, and I meant it when I said it, too. Then without even giving it a second thought, I was walking over towards the fence there where the guy and his two dogs were standing looking at me like they were waiting for me, and just like that, me and Macy became friends.

And after that, the next few nights he came around, I made a point of going over to where he and the dogs would be out by the van doing their thing, and we'd get to talking through the fence about this and that, whuppty whup, and I don't remember exactly how it came up--I might've been the one who brought it up, I don't know, doesn't really matter--but we took his van out around the different places where there'll sometimes be scraps of lumber left laying around outside the gate or beside the dumpster or whatever, and in almost no time at all we'd got enough 2 by 4's and quarter-inch, four by eight foot sheets of plywood that were full of nails and pretty nasty, but would still work for the walls once they'd been cleaned up. Then we bought a big tie-down tarp from Reggie over at the recycling center for eight bucks that could be draped over the whole thing. And using Macy's watch to time ourselves, in exactly three hours and twenty-five minutes from the time we got back with the materials and slid them underneath the fence and dragged them over to where we'd be working by my place, cleaned up the boards and then kind of laid everything out like it was going to look like when we were done--starting right then, that's all the time it took us to set up and tie together the 2 by 4 frame, top and bottom, with the three sheets of plywood laid alongside and tied on that'd be the lower part of the walls for support and hold everything real straight and sturdy so that you couldn't knock it over, unless you ran into it with your shoulder as hard as you could a bunch of times. And even then, you probably wouldn't knock it all the way down, and you'd end up hurting your shoulder more than the house. That's way better than, say, a tent, where somebody with evil intentions can jump right on top of you like you're in one of those zip-lock bags and you're trapped inside can't get out and you can't see anything. No way in hell you could get me to stay inside a tent.

So then Macy and I started working the pallettes together, and with his van we were able to do some serious good, because we had transportation. We'd drive around the whole area in his van and pick up pallettes alongside the road or at the different loading-docks, or wherever, and then haul them back to our spot

and repair them as much as we could without having a skillsaw, you know, but enough so that we'd pick up probably an extra dollar on each one we'd fixed. Then we'd load them back into his van and take them over to the pallette yard and sell them. We're talking about maybe eighty to even a hundred-fifty bucks a day, sometimes--split two ways, sixty-forty, since it was his van. Not too shabby, huh? I mean, considering, like Macy'd say, two fuck-ups with two fucked up dogs and one half-ass van.

So that's the way it kind of worked out, and that's the way we played it for a while. Three or four months, anyway. Money in our pockets and shelter from the storm, kind of thing, you know. Macy and I both knew how to kind of stay out of each other's way and when to do it, and we were both careful, especially at first, to pay close attention to the little bullshit that can end up jumping out at you after a while. Things like, I don't know, just basic stuff: who didn't clean this or that up from around our spot; who left the pan outside when they weren't using it anymore, whuppty whup. You understand? And making sure that when you said you were going to do something, you did it--or else you didn't say you were going to, just to be making noise that sounded good. There's a whole lot of that shit going around out here, let me tell you. Our neighbors over there on the other side, sometimes I'd be fucking amazed the way one of them would look you right in the eye and tell you they were going to do this or that thing in a few minutes or first thing in the morning and see you there or come wake me up or I'll be right over, and honest to God, never, not for a second, have any notion of doing it. Drugs, you might say, and you'd probably be about right. But drugs can't make a motherfucker change that much. They'd have to have had at least some of that already inside 'em, just waiting to jump out, first chance it got. But don't get me started. The thing is, Macy and me, we trusted each other and got along there in our spot pretty good. But a couple of times there he did piss me off.

There are different groups that come around a few times a week with food, usually church groups of some sort. Different groups at different times, usually in the early evenings, and some days, like beginning around noon on Saturdays, as many as three different groups might show up with food, and a lot of times with clothes and blankets and these little zip-lock bags with soap and toothpaste, razors, toothbrushes, mouthwash--that kind of thing. And condoms. Lots of condoms. Even the groups connected to the Catholic Church'll slap a three-pack of rubbers in your hand along with your paper plateful of spaghetti and meatballs.

But I'm telling you the truth. I don't know about other cities, but in L.A. you can't possibly starve to death unless you want to or you're too stupid to chew food. And it might even piss you off to hear this, but a lot of people can actually manage to get fat being what you'd call homeless. I don't mean gain weight, either. I mean fat. And it's okay if it pisses you off, because, you know, it pisses me off too. I guess it's just one of those things I was telling you about that I'm not going to be able to explain-- how it pisses me off, I mean. And, really, I probably inherited part of my attitude from Macy, who's really got a thing about fat ass hopeless homeless, he calls them. He says there's something that's obscene about a homeless motherfucker who's fat. It's like a fat vampire. I mean, it's kind of like you can't really blame a vampire for being a vampire--I mean, it is what it is, if you know what I mean. But a fat vampire? According to Macy, there's something that's a whole extra level of wrong about that.

So anyway, these different church groups will show up to feed us or whatever, and usually they're pretty cool about not pushing the God trip on everybody too much. I mean, they might some of them want to maybe say a quick prayer with you or for you or while you're standing in line there waiting to get fed. Or, like Macy says, at you, if you won't co-operate--which he usually wouldn't. He was kind of funny about that kind of thing, although funny isn't the right word for how he could get sometimes, if they crowded him too much about the prayer thing. I honest-to-God saw him with my own eyes one time hand his paper plate of meatloaf and cream corn back to the guy in the bed of the truck when these two women who were handing out the cups of punch at the rear bumper wouldn't leave him alone about their share-a-prayer. Actually, what he'd started to do at first was he'd just put his plate down on the asphalt by where we were standing and just backed away from it, kind of dramatic like, with both arms out at his sides. You know, making a point. Then he must have thought better of it, because he bent back down and picked the plate up and very politely handed it back to the man in the truck before walking off.

To tell you the truth, his acting like that pissed me off a little bit at the time, because, you know, the way I figured it, what the hell difference did it really make, anyway, if he just, you know, went along with the program and let the little mission ladies with their little white nurses' uniforms do their share-a-

prayer thing, whuppty-whup, and then we'd get our food and get on back to the fort. You know?

One of the prayer ladies was shaking her head, kind of shame-on-you-like, and asked him didn't he believe in God.

I believe in God. I just don't like him much.

Look at all he's given you. All the beauty everywhere you look, each day.

I agree. And I appreciate it. Maybe not enough, though. I think about it sometimes and make a conscious effort to be, you know, grateful.

You are blessed, we all are, every moment we are alive.

Whatever you say, mam, I'm not arguing with you. God has the best intentions in the world, as far as I'm concerned. And I thank him for that. It's his follow-through that's a mess. And his endings.

He doesn't end things worth a shit. He's a sloppy killer. Doesn't do it clean.

You don't mean that, and I know you don't. You of all people walk in his blessing.

I mean it alright. Like cancer. Ever watch anybody die of cancer? One of God's faithful? What kind of behavior is that for a God to perpetrate upon his flock?

I agree with you, Mam, but just because so far I've been blessed doesn't have anything to do with HIS failures. No wait, you asked me, and so let me finish. With all the beauty and miracle....

But by then the woman had her hands over her ears.

Before I go any further, I want to tell you about Dixie, because it's important you get to know her a little.

She snored a lot, the way fat dogs seem to do, and depending on what she got hold of to eat, she could have some serious gas, but that was okay because she was a good girl,

As long as you didn't come up on her all of a sudden and startle her, because she'd get confused real easy--which could be bad news. Macy'd had her for-I think he told me-about ten years. Which is a long

time for a guy like Macy and a dog like Dixie, and for a place like the seventh street bridge.

The Thing about her was you had to get past the way she looked, and that wasn't easy, and even now, right this very minute, I feel bad saying that about her.

She was already old when he got her. He actually took her away from some kids who had her and I guess were fighting her and nearly killing her because she was already old and couldn't see what she was doing even back then, the fuck heads. And so Macy was driving up Soto St. over by Sears one day and saw these two kids pulling her along on a chain tied in a knot around her neck and her limping and torn up and shit and them not even slowing down for her, just jerking her along to make her keep up with them. Macy pulled his van over to the curb a little ways up ahead of them and got out and went around to the sidewalk side and opened up his sliding door and put the latch on LOCK. He gave Henry the command to STAY there on the front seat, and Henry knew how to stay and did. Then Macy he got Henry's brand new leash out of the back of the van, a real nice six foot length leather number that costs at least ten or twelve bucks at Petco, and when these two kids came along the sidewalk by where he was standing he held the leash out to them in his hand and asked them if they wanted it. They were maybe twelve or so, is what Macy figured, not quite at that REAL badass stage yet, but getting there quick enough, you know, so that they backed off just for a second at this white guy offering them this brand new leash out of nowhere like that, but there's this thing about Macy that I don't care who you are you just KNOW he's cool and that he's not the enemy, and even Dixie knew it right away, because she was by then sniffing his leg and looking up at him and wagging her ragged-ass tail at him. I mean, how many pit bulls do you know that'll wag their tails period, let alone at some strange white man. So, fuck yeah, they'd take the leash, no problem, and Macy gave them the leash. Then he crouched down alongside Dixie and held her real easy-like, talking to her, making sure she was still wagging her tail, because, you know she was bleeding in a whole bunch of places and he could tell she was hurting probably just about everywhere-especially around the neck area where they had the chain wrapped round. So Macy told them to put a loop through the leash he gave them, so that way it could work as a collar too so they wouldn't have to be fucking around with the chain any more, which made sense, you know, and he eased the chain off Dixie's neck real careful, while one of the kids got ready with the leash to loop it over her head once the chain was off, and then, once Macy got it off her, he patted her and kind of soothed her for a second there on the sidewalk, then he leaned over her, wrapped his arms around her middle, and, as

fast as he could he stood up out of his crouch, picking her big ass up off the ground at the same time and turned around with her in his arms and in one motion slid her into the back of his van and slid the locked door shut. And the way Macy told it to me was that even before the two kids even really had a chance to react, he was moving around to the driver's side of the van as fast as his forty-year-old white ass could, and by the time the kids started shouting and banging on the side of the van, one of them still holding the leash, Macy was rolling down Soto street with Henry yapping at the kids thru the passenger window and Dixie wobbling around in the back.

So the part of the story you already basically know about, the trouble part, starts with the guy from the newspaper article, this James Washington Jr., showing up just before christmas, a couple of months after Macy had settled in at our spot. Anyway, I think that's what they said his name was. Or maybe John. Something like that. It doesn't matter, anyway, because nobody that I know of ever called him that--not Macy, not anybody ----- I didn't know that was even his name before I read it in the paper. I just knew him as J.J., like everybody else. Or sometimes as Youngster.

Like I said, I've always pretty much for one reason or another kept to myself out here. But I don't put out one of those leave me the fuck alone vibes or anything hostile like that--at least I don't think I do. Even though the truth is, I really do want to be left the fuck alone, most of the time, or even all the time, these last few years. So, yeah, I guess it's possible that some of that might leak out a little once in a while, and I might come off as somebody who wants to be left the fuck alone. Anyway, never mind that. The point is, I still get around a lot and, you know, intermingle when it's called for. As a matter of fact, I can intermingle like a motherfucker when I want to. Just so you don't get the wrong idea and start looking at me like some wild man on the corner with a shopping cart. This shopping cart is how I make a living, I use it for recycling. Right now, as we speak, I have somewhere between, I'd say, twelve to fifteen dollars worth of glass here in the basket, and maybe another five to seven worth of plastic and cans in these bags. And if they'll take this piece of aluminum, you're looking at twenty, twenty-five bucks for three hours work. And it's not even noon.

But of all the different people I've gotten to know in all the time I've been out and around here, this JJ wins the asshole prize. And you know what? I'm not even sure I can honestly explain why, exactly. There're a lot of people out here who're

definitely worse, if you're talking about dangerous or scandalous or whatever. A whole lot. But just something about JJ, even just thinking about him right this minute, he still takes the cake.

This JJ some kind of way knew Macy from before, and Macy knew him. Neither one of them ever told me exactly how or where they knew each other from, or anything like that, and I never asked. Most times, with somebody coming around the spot like that, I'd have asked Macy what was up, no problem. But this something about the way things would always seem to be when he was around, wasn't like most times. I'm not saying I couldn't have asked and gotten an answer from Macy. I'm just saying that Macy knew damn well from the first time JJ showed up alongside the fence in his green Jeep Cherokee and hollered out Macy's name like it was a goddamn high school parking lot, instead of under a bridge, where it was important that everybody kind of keep things low key and not be drawing attention like that--Macy knew I'd be wanting to know who the hell this guy was. I mean, who he was to Macy, to be getting away with some shit like that. Even some of the people from the other side over there mumbled something to me about it, you know. But Macy, for whatever reason, never said squat about it or explained what was up with him and this guy, except that they went back a ways and that everything was cool. Not to worry about it.

But everything wasn't cool. Not even close. For one thing, this JJ guy was an asshole. Straight out asshole. Everything about him gave off an asshole vibe. The way he walked, talked, everything. Even from a distance. I mean, just seeing him get out of his car, you'd think he looked like an asshole, his eyes darting around all the time to see who might be looking at him. And I don't mean watching him, I mean looking at him. There's a difference. And whatever it was that made him turn out the way he did, I know it probably wasn't all his fault, and who knows what he'd gone through growing up. But one thing I do know for sure about how he got the way he was, is that in some kind of way race had a lot to do with it.

But before I say anything else, I want to first tell you that if for some reason from what I'm saying you end up getting the idea that I'm prejudiced or racially biased, or anything like that, it's okay. I can respect your opinion, and I promise I won't hold it against you. And you, on the other hand, all you have to do for

me in exchange is to keep an open mind to the possibility that everything I say about this half-breed motherfucker is the truth.

He was part black. Let's start with that. I don't know how much or, like, what percentage or anything--and it wouldn't have made any difference, anyway. Because whatever it was wasn't ever going to be enough, and wasn't even close to as black as he was trying to be. It could wear your ass out just being around him, he was trying so hard. For some reason it's always the real light-skinned fools like this JJ that get that way. And you actually see it a lot more than you'd think that, and also how loud he always had to be about just nothing.

Well, so anyway--and wouldn't you just know it-- there was this girl who came around a couple of times with this JJ. I mean, she was with him, and then, really, she wasn't. Depending on if you were asking her or him. That kind of thing. Her name was Lanayea, or something real close sounding to that, but I'd only ever heard her called Lanny. And that was even before she'd started showing up with JJ's nervous ass hovering over her. Way before. Couple of years when I had my spot over behind the Recycler at Fourth and Towne--she was around then, on and off. Different guys, at least two that I remember, but I didn't know any of them. Just saw them with her. No big thing. I'm not saying she was necessarily something bad or dirty or anything, just because she'd had these different boyfriends. I'm just saying she was somebody who a lot of people knew better than Macy or JJ did.

But the trouble started when this Lanny came over by herself to see Macy a couple of times without J.J. knowing about it--I mean, first she came up with some lame-ass excuse about needing real bad to get over to the check cashing place on fifth and Main, saying that J.J. was "all, like, tripping about something he says I said to Cleo, and won't take me." She was outside Macy's flap, kind of bent over at the waist with her hands on her knees, stretching her head and neck politely towards his doorway while she was talking, breaking no rules. That way, if anybody was watching what she was doing and told J.J. about it, there was nothing to tell except that she had very politely and respectfully stood outside and asked him for a ride--which he'd, by the way, said no to. Okay, sorry to bother you. Dot dot dot. And then she'd leave and a few minutes later Macy'd come out of his place and need to run an errand or go to the store or

something, and he'd get in his van and leave for a couple of hours. Making any sense to you?

I never said a word to him about it, even though it pissed me off just the possibility they might've even for a moment thought that whole diddle dance they'd just been doing had been intended for me, and that if it was, that it had worked.

Well so, that went on for, I'd guess, maybe a month. And then one night, just like anybody with any sense at all could have predicted, they got caught. J.J. came up on them parked over by JandB liquor. He'd must have found out about it from somebody and been looking for them, because I guess he just came up to the side of the van there where it was parked with the curtains pulled and everything and nobody sitting in the passenger seats, but still knowing damn well they were in there, and started banging on the side windows and yelling and carrying on. And then when finally Macy came out from there in his bare feet and not wearing any shirt, and stepped down from the driver's side to try to calm things down somehow, I don't know, that's when J.J. went shit crazy and jumped on Macy and the two of them went down tangled up in the street. Macy'd done some wrestling in high school somewhere up in Washington, and I suspect, just from a couple of things he'd said about trying to spit and piss out fluids in order to make weight for the state championships, he must have been at least pretty good to get that far. So I mean, he wasn't going to punch anybody's lights out, like J.J. was trying to do to him, but he was wiry as hell, and seemed like all he needed was just to get one hand on you somewhere, anywhere, and that'd be all she wrote. You couldn't get loose, and pretty quick from there he'd have hold of one of your legs and you'd be falling over backwards with him on top of you. Then he'd kind of tie your arms and legs up and have you face down with him riding you into the ground until you were flat out exhausted just trying to get him the fuck off you, which you never could. And he'd keep you pinned down like that until you either changed your mind about things or ran out of gas and quit. Even though he hadn't actually hit you any. And if you got hurt, it was going to be from getting your face mashed into the ground, or from when you'd first hit the ground with him on top of you. Single leg take-down, it was called. And the thing where he'd hold onto your wrists and keep them pinned up underneath your chest so that you'd be, like, laying on them and couldn't get loose: that was a double wrist-ride. I'd seen him do it twice before, different times with assholes underneath the bridge about something or other, and that's what

he was doing to J.J. there in the street when I came walking up. That's when the police showed up too, lights and everything. I had to jump out of the way to keep from getting run over. Just the one cruiser at first, then the back-up. They snatched Macy and J.J. up off the asphalt, then threw 'em back down on both their faces, then snatched them up again and threw 'em back down again, all the while yelling, these cops, at the top of their lungs for Macy and J.J. to "Stop Resisting Arrest!" Then, when one of the cops, a big young bull-necked sucker, Officer Gomez, took hold of Macy again and started to slam him down a third time, Macy did some little side shift or something, I'm not sure what, but he all of a sudden was able to tuck one of Gomez's big-ass arms under his own arm and then sprawl his legs straight out in front himself, so that he was off the ground in almost a sitting position, still with Gomez's arm locked under his armpit and he and Gomez with down to the pavement, Gomez face-first. And that's when all shit broke out. And I mean, big time. By then there were a whole bunch of us crowded around where it was happening, and we were all screaming at the cops to stop hitting Macy with those fucking sticks. Because he wasn't doing anything even to protect himself, just laying there on his stomach, with Gomez, with his face scraped up and his elbow bleeding, sitting in the middle of his back holding his arms down stretched out full length on the street, while one of the other cops was wacking Macy's legs and feet with his stick. The only way you could really tell Macy wasn't, you know, unconscious or even dead was the way his legs would jump every time the stick would hit his legs. Then another car with the Sergeant showed up, him driving it himself, and the other cops kind of chilled a little. They dragged Macy to his feet, but he was too fucked up to stand, and slid back down on his side, where they left him for the moment. Three cop cars, five cops, Macy and J.J. in handcuffs. And the girl, Lanny. And here's the important part: She'd asked him for a ride, she said, that one there, Macy, 'cause she knew him through her boyfriend, the one right there, J.J. And when they'd got to the liquor store he'd all of a sudden, this Macy guy, like, grabbed her and dragged her into the back and was, like, "all over me, and wouldn't stop," and that was when her boyfriend, J.J. had shown up, thank God! and don't hurt him, because he hadn't done anything except "stop this guy from raping me."

So Macy and J.J. got taken to jail, and after a while J.J. got let go but Macy didn't. The girl had said "tried to rape" earlier

when they were all out in the street there behind R and P liquor, and she'd said "tried to rape" downtown a little while later when the arresting officers were walking her through the paperwork and the crisis/counseling team was in attendance. And so, "tried to rape" or attempted rape, felonious sexual assault, was how they were going to play it. Plus, assaulting a police officer and maybe even assaulting J.J., when he'd tried to rescue Sondra, but you'd have to figure that'd of been a long shot. But now your talking about three strikes.

I borrowed a bike from Reggie over at the recycling place on Towne St. and headed over to Parker Center and just kind of posted up outside there along the sidewalk, so that I'd be there to see whatever, you know. And after a couple hours Sondra came out with asshole J.J. They'd cut him loose. The two of them, the victim and her rescuer, walked past me, but didn't say squat to me, and I didn't say anything to them, either, but later I wished I would have. I don't know what, but something.

J.J.s face was puffed up pretty good, but I don't know if that was from Macy or the cops. But either way, he was going to look like shit for at least a week, probably more, for what it was worth.

Now, I'm going to skip over a lot of this next part, because there's really not much of anything I can add to what you've already been told. I mean, what was in the papers and everything, when they referred back to this sexual assault conviction, all that was true and accurate and factually correct. Including the fact that the defendant had plead guilty to what was really a lesser charge than what it was originally. All true. No problem. I even agree with you: He was a lucky sonofabitch.

Especially when you consider this: With the aggravated sexual assault, plus assaulting a police officer and resisting arrest, Macy was looking at five years, easy, probably more-- especially if he pissed everybody off by exercising his rights and putting them through the hassle and expense of actually convicting him by jury trial. Because of how crowded and overfuckingwhelmed the criminal court system is in downtown Los Angeles, and probably everywhere else for all I know, it's set up so that the way it works, without anybody coming out and saying it, is for example: You want a trial, Macy? Huh? Okay, no problem. You got it. A jury trial? Hey, why not? But tell you what, ol' buddy...you better-ass fucking win, because every citizen who's even walked past the criminal courts building is flat had it with how much hassle and money goes into protecting the

rights of your dope-smoking, bridge squatting, van humping, pit bull loving ass. And the jury? They hate your ass even before they leave the house, because they do not want to be here, and you, Macy, asshole, are the reason they are. The question of whether you're innocent or guilty in the long run won't even have anything to do with it. Stamina and hunger is what you'd better pay attention to. Even with the D.A. needing a unanimous verdict, it's still a hell of a lot easier and quicker to find your ass guilty than innocent, because for a jury to come back innocent takes time and work, jurors holding out, resisting.

If it's after six o'clock and the jury's looking at staying late and missing dinner at home, or maybe coming back tomorrow again-unless one of them is a hero with a full stomach and no plans for the evening, your ass is going to jail. And the judge, who feels the same way they do, only with the power to slap somebody's ass about it when he gets mad-which is often-is by now taking the whole thing very personally, and don't ever let anybody tell you different. You lose, you're going to pay.

If, on the other hand, you do like Macy did and plead guilty to a lesser sexual assault, the D.A. will agree to drop the assaulting an officer and resisting arrest etc. and you'll get sixteen months at Susanville State Prison, which is better than most, and with time served and overcrowding, you might be home in a year or even less.

So Macy went away, and I was left in charge of the dogs and his things, which didn't really amount to much of anything. The van, since it was used in the commission of a felony, was confiscated and after thirty days sold at one of those police auctions you hear about. You know, the ones where all this really expensive stuff, like drug dealers' and drug smugglers' cars and boats and cool stuff like that are sold real cheap. Well, maybe, but I've never seen it like that. I've just seen a lot of old vans like Macy's and whatever was inside them at the time of the arrest. Other than that, he just had some clothes and books and kitchen stuff, and there was a duffle bag full of some laundry and a cell phone that uses pre-paid minutes but didn't work, and a walk-man with headset that did. There was also a couple of denim shirts that were on hangers, along with a pretty cool sport jacket and a pair of kaki pants that all were covered with plastic dry-cleaner bags. Macy always called this stuff in the bags his "legitimacy look." And since for his trial all he could wear was the county blues and slippers everybody gets issued when they in-process at county, when I took the bus up to his three court appearances and wanted to, you know, look, you know,

legitimate sitting out there, I wore one of his shirts and his sport jacket with some pants of my own.

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While he was gone, I went back to recycling. Which was okay. Not great, but okay. Besides, I had two other mouths to feed now.

Dixie, bless her heart, stayed inside Macy's place almost all the time while he was gone. Couple of times, I'd had to stick my head in there just to make sure she was still alive. Seriously. But when I'd look in through the flap, there she'd be, laying curled up on his bed there, her big head propped up on her front paws and her tail slapping against the blanket, because she'd know it was me. She'd basically only come out to do her business, and she was always real good about that. She never, not once, had an accident inside the house. She was a good girl.

Henry, though, now Henry was a whole different deal. And they weren't accidents, either. He'd lift his nasty-ass leg and piss on the wall as a matter of deliberate choice. And without a trace of shame or guilt. I say that because after he'd piss, he'd do that little scratch-strut-scratch dance that dogs'll sometimes do after they piss. Mostly little cocky dogs, seems like. Anyway, a dog that does that isn't feeling guilty.

And he'd stink all the time. Right after I'd give him a bath, even. He'd run outside the minute I let loose of him and wallow around on his back with his legs kicking and thrashing around in the air and in the middle of the nastiest place he could find. A dead something or other was perfect, but some slimy place in the dirt where maybe something had at one time or another been laying there dead was fine too. And I had to keep the hairs around his dick and his butthole trimmed, otherwise he'd really get to stinking. But getting him to hold still while I tried trimming him without stabbing him with the sizzers would give me a headache, I'd be so nervous. He right away started staying over with me after Macy left, sleeping up against the back of my head after I'd fall asleep and stop pushing him away. Dixie, like I said, stayed pretty much inside over there at Macy's.

I do really like the little asshole. The truth is, I like him a lot. And what's a little weird about that-about how I feel about Henry, I mean-is that I don't love Henry. Or, anyway, it's hard for me to think of myself as loving him, for some reason.

Even though it's not part of the story and doesn't figure into any of what I'm telling you about Macy, I want to real quick here point out something for the guy or the woman or whatever he is who kept referring to Macy and me as homeless and part of the

swelling epidemic, whuppty whup. This was right after it happened, even before the court thing. The newspaper stories. There were a couple, but this was the first one, the big one with Macy's picture and everything. That one. Okay, here's the deal. People living under the bridges aren't what I would call homeless. I'm not homeless. I mean, I am right now, since all this happened, but when I was in my spot there under 7th. St. I wasn't. I was living there because between that and whatever other places I had to choose from--the missions, the homeless outreach programs, rent vouchers and all that-- I'd choose the bridge in a heartbeat. But now, it depends a lot on the bridge, too, and which side of the river, and who all else is up under there with you at the same time, and whuppty whup...But just generally speaking, the bridge life isn't so bad, once you kind of settle into it. It sure as hell isn't like those fools over there around the missions, like 5th and Crocker, living on the sidewalk alongside the Fred Jordan in tents or whatever. Or up at the Midnight Mission and the Rescue. Those are the cardboard city people you see when you come down 4th St. from the 110, as you head East. Can you believe that shit? At night they're packed side by side, one box up against another, all the way from Broadway down to Main, both sides of the street. Now, those are homeless people. They get up in the morning and walk away from that spot where they were just sleeping, and that spot is gone. It either gets taken by somebody else, or the city clean-up trucks and crews run you off. They come down along the sidewalk there with their big orange street-cleaner with its big spinning rear roller-brush hissing and spitting gutter-slime all out the sides and all over anybody that doesn't get their ass on along before it gets there. Now that's homeless. When you wake up and walk away and ten minutes later you can't come back to it, that's not your home. Bridge life is like a gated community compared to that. And safer in some ways, too, since you're not down there in the mix, and somebody's got to want to get you to come all the way over here and crawl through the fence in order to do whatever they're wanting to do. But then, you know as well as I do, after the thing with Macy, that it can't be that damn hard to do, because even a fool like JJ was able to do it.

And so, anyway, one day just about exactly ten months after he left, Macy came home. I didn't hear him-the dogs did. And Dixie heard him even before Henry, which wasn't something that happened very

often, let me tell you. And sweet Jesus, you should've seen that, you want to see something to put a smile on your face, her fat old half-blind ass barreling full speed past where I was sitting in front of my place, and making a bee-line for the hole in the fence behind the steps there. At first I thought they might be after something, you know, only they weren't barking as they lit out towards the fence, either one of them, like they normally would have been doing. They were yelping. Then, when I stood up and looked over to where they were, here they came with Macy in behind them, him grinning like he was embarrassed or something and them spinning around every couple of steps and running back at him, jumping up all over him. And I mean all over him, even fat Dixie, which was a sight to behold.

I let him go on into his place by himself, him and the dogs, you know, to just sort of get used to being back, or being out, without having someone right there in his face. I mean, think about it, when in the last ten months had he ever one single time been able to be by himself, really by himself, without at least somebody or some video camera looking at him. And that's all the time, if you get my drift.

But then after a little while, after he got kind of settled in over there and got his bearings, he came over and kind of stuck his head through my doorway-which, come to think of it, is pretty much all he ever did. I don't remember him but only a couple of times ever really coming inside my place. Henry, yes. Dixie never, and Macy just the couple of times, for whatever reason-and I honestly never thought about it until right this second. But anyway, he poked his head inside there and told me he appreciated how I'd looked after things, and that I'd looked pretty sharp in his sport coat in court those times, thanks for coming, whuppty whup. I'd sent him a card once when he was in there, but I must've filled it out wrong, because he never got it. But he waved me off and said it was cool, didn't matter. And then after we'd talked like that for a little bit, and he was looking at something off to the side of where I was sitting, and he just turned towards me and looked at me real even and straight-real still and quiet-like, is the only way I can describe it-and he thanked me for taking care of his dogs. He wasn't going to cry or anything like that, you understand-that's not what I'm saying. But his voice was very different from ever before and whatever that meant, I knew he meant he was grateful to me. And that was very cool. Very cool. Because Macy wasn't an exceptionally thank you kind of guy. I mean, he wasn't an asshole or anything even close to it. I'm not saying he was like, you know, the strong silent John Wayne type either. It's just that for whatever reason, and it could be a lot of things, he didn't run around thanking you for this and that all the time, even though you always knew he knew what was up and what

you'd done. But anyway, felt good about it because it meant that he'd been able to count on me and I'd come through.

Actually, it was Henry who found the box with the magazines and stuff. Really, there wasn't much left besides the magazines: Couple of college textbooks, looked like. Psychology In Modern Living, was one of them. An empty cleenex box, one woman's tennis shoe, size 8, and that's about it. The magazines were Psychology Today, I remember, and the article was about sexual predators, and about this new kind of program that started in Oregon or Washington State, I think it was, where even after somebody has served his sentence, he still can be held in, like, a mental facility pretty much indefinitely for evaluation and treatment until they decide you aren't going to do whatever it is you did again. Which is probably good, you know, except that one of the ways they decide if you're ready to leave the institution or not is they sit you down in a chair with wires on your dick and they show slides of naked girls, children even, engaging in sex acts and all kinds of real nasty shit. I mean, where they even get these pictures, you've got to wonder. But the point is, they show you these pictures and if your dick gets hard, you stay locked up. That's basically the deal. And the joke about the whole thing is, even though it's not really funny, is that when they show these nasty pictures up there on the screen in front of the patient/inmate or whatever and also the guards and staff who are there monitoring the whole thing--basically, a roomful of people looking at this nasty stuff--there probably isn't a soft dick in the house. Even though there isn't anybody else besides the patient that has wires hooked up to his dick to prove it. It's funnier the way Macy told it when he was reading the article that day. And then somebody in the article was quoted saying something about how any sexual predator, once he acts upon his fantasies and gets a "taste" for it, will always, without exception want it again--and in most cases, almost without exception, will try to get it again--and Macy didn't act like he thought it was funny anymore. And after that is when he wasn't the same, for some reason, as he was before he read the article.

I mean, he didn't have to go through any of that stuff himself. He wasn't considered somewhere along the legal chain of command to be a risk--maybe because they knew it was a plea bargain about some nothing kind of bullshit charge in the first place. Who knows. But Macy was still classified as a convicted sexual predator while he was in prison, and that's something you do not want to be. They have to

isolate you from the regular prison population to keep you from getting killed. They even use a code name, twenty-eight, to describe you-as though everybody doesn't know, anyway, what you're in for when they refer to you as a twenty-eight and make you wear a different color outfit, a yellow one, for crissakes, and make a big deal out of keeping you off to yourselves, you and the other predators. Macy told me all this in one quick spit of words while he was still holding the magazine, even though he'd stopped reading it by then. Then he just kind of tossed it back in the box and walked on back down the slope and that was that.

But here's the part that puzzled me, and I'm actually still pissed at Macy about it in a way that I'd never want him to know, and I even feel a little shitty saying it now: He'd already been through the bullshit, you know? I mean, it was over. Behind him. So how's he going to then let himself, after going through all that, get fucked up by something he read in an article in a magazine he found in a box under a motherfucking bridge. You tell me.

Then one night I came in from making a recycling run across the river on fourth and Towne St. and knew the minute I came through the fence that Macy had company. I knew because both dogs were sitting out front of his place and the flap was shut, and the only reason in the world that Dixie and Henry would be out front like that was if this girl, Lanny, was inside there, because she was afraid of dogs. That's why they were ever in the van out there on the street that time in the first place. And so, sure enough, after a while when I was inside my place I heard the dogs making a little noise and, you know, moving around out front there, and through my flap I saw this girl's legs and ass pass by. And, like I said, its characteristics were familiar to me. This was a couple days after the article. And again, I'm no' saying for sure one had anything to do with the other. But she came around two or three times after that, always at night, and always the dogs would wait outside.

Then one night JJ showed up with two of his friends. I had Henry in with me on the bed, and Dixie was over with Macy who was sorting through his laundry. Henry heard something and jumped down off the bed and went to my door, and I thought I saw someone go past the opening there, but it was dark and it happened so quick I wasn't sure. And besides, Henry hadn't even barked. He just looked out the doorway, then came back and jumped up on the bed.

That's because, you see, he recognized JJ from before when he and Macy had been friends, before the girl, and anyway, he'd been taught by Macy, both of them had, to not be random barkers. Dixie hardly

ever barked, just by nature of her breeding, but now that she couldn't see anything, she was more likely to bite first and bark later.

JJ and his friends had come to either give Macy a beating or a killing. I say that because the other two had brought baseball bats and JJ when he rushed through the opening of Macy's place, was carrying a three-foot length of pipe with a taped handle for a better grip. It was the kind of weapon that, no matter where you got hit by it, you got hurt bad. And that's how he killed Dixie.

She was a good girl, that dog, and when that motherfucker pushed his way inside there where Macy was fixing something to eat, Dixie, even though she couldn't really see what she was doing tore the living shit out of his leg before he managed to get the right angle with the pipe when he swung it down on her old head, and that's what did it, she was no match for that. By then, I'd heard all this shit going on and came barrelling out of my place and saw these other two guys standing in front of Macy's flap, kind of hesitating like, you know, they couldn't decide whether or not they were still badasses or not, and in fact they moved out of the way as I bumped between them and into Macy's place. The guy with the pipe, JJ, Macy's ex-friend, somebody who'd been around Dixie and knew her, maybe even better than I did, he was just standing there, holding the pipe. But just holding it, that's all. He wasn't going to hit anybody any more. He was just standing there looking at Macy, who was bending over Dixie. She was laying there on her side shivering kind of, you know, convulsing, I guess you'd call it. I mean she was dying, but God in Heaven, it was slow and it was not clean.

Then Macy reached up under where his bedding was and from somewhere under there pulled out something in his hand, something dark he was holding, and put it gently up against Dixie's head, just below her ear, and shot her, and she stopped trembling. Then Macy sort of pressed his forehead down against the top of his knee, steadily but real hard. I mean MASHED his head against his leg and just held it there like that, making a kind of choked hissing sound with his throat, like a whine of some sort that you're trying to swallow to hold it back, I don't know, but he did this for maybe fifteen seconds, but I'm only guessing, it could have been five seconds or an hour for all I know, with me and JJ with his pipe, both of us just standing there watching Macy kneeling there like that. But however long it was, when he stopped doing it, he kind of took a quick breath and lifted up his head and looked at us for a moment, then he raised the pistol and shot JJ in the mouth.

It didn't kill him, but it fucked him up. It was a 22 caliber and you've pretty much got to know what you're doing, either that or not know ANYthing to kill yourself with one of those, and Macy was never any kind of gun person that I know of, and like I say, he and I were pretty close. But then, on the other hand, I didn't know he even Had a gun, so go figure.

The bullet got JJ in the mouth just as he was jerking his head to the side by reflex, so it tore through his lip and took out a front tooth and some top teeth on one side on its way out his cheek, so he was lucky. And I guess you could say Macy was lucky, even though it's still pretty fucked up all the way around. I mean, Macy won't be back for a long time, you've gotta figure. After all that the police felt like they had to do this clean sweep of the first sixth and seventh street bridges and run everybody, me included, out. They didn't mess with the people under the fourth street bridge, for some reason, I don't know why, but I'm not going there. And I've got Henry's little ass with me, and I'm not wild about having to look after him for the rest of his life, and maybe mine, but really it's not all that bad, you know. I don't love the little fucker. But I like him a lot. Let's just leave it at that.

And at least this way I'll know that Macy knows that I'm out here with his dog, and that everything's cool. And I figure since it worked out like that, that's the way I'll play it for a while.
