

Peter Hayes

The Good Samaritan

“Alright, so you want to know how I got in here?” I says to the wall of sullen faces. Staring at me like I’m a rat covered in sewer crap. You got to love the prison crowd.

“You a pincher?” says one from the back. Mexican street boy, got scars crisscrossing his face the way planes dice up the sky in an air show.

“I ain’t no pincher. Never spilled on anyone. And no one’s doing time because of me. Or ever will, boys. I’m solid through and through.” I tells them this and that. Like what my street cred’s looking like and all the street boys I know who’s pushing, jailed or dead. Word on the street’s that so-and-so copped a raw deal and ended up spiking strychnine into the mainline. Woke up blue as the sky. And on and on. Ad infinitum. Them stories dribble forever the way politicians got a thousand ways to tell one lie.

“Well, I’ll tell you why I’m here, boys,” says I, “Because I ain’t gonna be labeled as no pincher. And I know how them ugly rumors spring up. So here’s my thing so you all know the deal: I had a loft up on Fourth, corner of Franklin. Been running around there to keep the habit up as the story goes. Remember my old boy Johnny hustling

down Franklin, cutting down the mainline in his Nissan, I's swaying with him under tin roofs from the rain. Up on Jackson Street where Mama Maria spiked the mainline with that nasty stuff. You know how the abscesses boil up when them kids cut it with detergent. Anyway, somebody should have done something- you know I never forget the way them Po-Po made a move to hide her face. To hide her body. And her kids staring right into those black, glassy eyes. Man, kids like that end up in the orphanage. And then what? So, things kept kicking around. I's moving from one sick bed to another. Ever notice how the priests heal from a distance? Soup kitchen and I's in the bread line with this one old priest. You see it straight off like he's got a sign: I care but I won't get involved. Not like Jesus or nothing. No washing feet. Nah, that's too far out. So me, I ask him what time it is. First off he jumps like I capped my piece in his face. Real slow he says the time. Kind of mumbles it low and shady. Well, thanks, I guess. You get the impression this cat'll be swallowing disinfectant ten minutes from now.

You guys know the old Po-Po routine. One blue guy on each corner but they's in unmarked cars and they walking around trying to score dope like we don't know who they is. Man, if I could put a face on why I dropped out from the rat race, boys. A face- a frowny face- for all the reasons I don't trust nobody in charge over me. Well, you watch a couple them Narcs beat a boy down with their sticks just cause he's on the wrong corner. Like I said, if I could put a face on it-- a face of every Narc.

Recollect my old home boy King Larry- that's what we calls him. See, King Larry makes a real racket off sliding fake info to the Narcs. Eventually, it sunk him and now he's got a rap that keeps him in Gander Hill the next ten years. But King Larry, he'd slide on over to a cop cruiser and say, "Well, the word is that a couple ounces of pure H is coming down Maryland Ave. at midnight, that's tonight. It'll be coming in a big blue van driven by this Mexican cat named Manuel."

Of course, the real shipment came in off Rt.13, other side of town. Yeah, King Larry really had those clowns hopping around like grasshoppers in a forest fire.

But how I got here. Well, I'm not a bad guy. All my deals, my issues, come cause I care too much and CNN makes me want to pop lead in every politician's face.

Me, I'm coming out this loft my boy's got on Maryland Ave. I just scored some pure H and fighting off nods as I hit the sidewalk. This was one of those scorchers. Yeah, the sun's melting the cement. As I walk I see Stop signs wither and shrivel up.

And right under this little porch awning, a boy about six, all barefoot. Kid's crying real quiet like he don't want anybody to know. His clothes is torn up some and I notice he look real, I don't know, scrawny I guess you'd say.

Like I says I'm not a bad guy. Compassionate. Always have been. Remember when I was that age listening to my mama cook rock in the bathroom.

So I says, "What you crying about, son?"

He sort of tries and turn away but still whimpers, "I'm hungry. I ain't eaten in three days."

"Three days?" says I, "Where your mama at? Your poppa?"

Kid says, "I don't have no poppa. And my mom's over at Juanita's drinkin' beer and playing cards. She told me I got to leave. I ain't got nowhere to go."

"Nowhere? Ain't you got friends? Family?"

"No one," the kid, he says and breaks down and cries.

Well, I couldn't just leave him there. It was hot, man, I'm telling you. And that wasn't no part of town a kid should just be laying about. What with street boys slinging dope and crack on the corner.

“I’ll buy you some food, kid,” Tells him that while wondering how much green I even got left, “Come on, there’s a burger joint right around the corner. You dig burgers?”

Kid looks at me sideways, unsure, asks, “What I got to do for it? I got to sell something for you on the corner?”

“No, kid. All you got to do is eat the burger.”

Simple enough, I think he grasped the concept. So we go walking down the sidewalk into the eye of heat. Well, I feel so bad I even try and keep the kid in my shadow so he’s out the sun much as possible. Then I says:

“You want me to carry you, kid? You feets gonna get all burned up.”

So I carries the boy on my shoulders and soon he starts laughing a little. His ugly mood evaporating.

This part’s where the story gets real nasty. Why I got reservation about authority and all that.

So we’re sitting in this burger joint on Fourth, just me and him eating burgers. Place is empty ‘cept for us.

Right about then this Narc walks in. You can smell a Narc the way a cloud follows him. Smog is the word.

Well, he sees me sitting at the same table as this little black kid. I never mentioned he was black and I’m white because the thought never entered my head, either. I was just helping the kid out, right?

“You gotta reason being with that kid,” Narc says through his teeth. I always notice when they speak their mouth never moves. Like some kind of disembodied voice.

“I’m buying him burgers...he was hungry...” Says I, and at this point I feel the heat rising.

“Oh, burgers, eh?” Narc’s worm lips twitch, maybe smiling real faint, “That’s tasty. Buying kids burgers...”

“Sure.”

“Well, we got us a report from that kid’s mother: She been looking all over for that kid. And the neighbors seen you pick him up and walk away with him.”

“It’s not like that. I just wanted to help the kid out,” I says real loud, “He told me he was hungry.”

Narc flaps his jacket up over his ears, “I guess you got no drugs on you. No warrants or nothing. You just a good old boy. A good Samaritan always looking out to help. That it?”

Well, of course the question was rhetorical. And now I’m here with all you boys in this crap can. My PO tells me I’ve got a lot of issues, problems and I needs tons of rehabs and sessions and such. I got something in me that makes me want to kidnap little boys. And, of course, I won’t get out this hell without admitting to it and going through some sort of rebirth. So much for the good Samaritans.”