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He Left the Same as He Entered

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Greg walked into the office as he did everyday, setting his lunch down on the shiny metal table that sat adjacent to the door. Calling this place an office was an obvious stretch, but it was better than referring to it as the "Dead Drop-off," as the other coroner Bruce always refers to it. Every time the cops stopped by, they would remark about how absurd it was to call it the Coroner's office. They always mused at Bruce's not-so-subtle nickname."

Cover Page Footnote

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He Left the Same as He Entered

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It wasn't easy being a coroner, God knows not everyone had the stomach for it, but Greg had grown quite used to it, almost indifferent. The sight of dead bodies, no matter how grotesque, no longer bothered him. It was very rare that Greg saw a corpse that could even remotely disturb his lunch. It took something special, something new and exotic to do that. Greg figured that was to be expected after twenty-eight years of looking at death firsthand.

When he first got the job as a city coroner, Greg realized that he would need to do something to keep from losing his while he was surrounded by these unmoving people, so he began to formulate stories about the person in his mind while he performed their autopsies. He once truly believed that he had the real Elvis on his table back in 1996, but he took a lot of abuse from Bruce for it, so now he only privately told the stories of these dead men and women.

The previous evening must have been pretty slow in the city, as there was only one new body before him this morning. The write-up on the corpse indicated that it was a homeless man who had been brutally beaten to death. The name was an all too familiar one, John Doe. Greg saw at least one John Doe a week, and often times wondered what it would be like to really be named John Doe. It always brought a smile to his face when he pictured some guy walking around who had died fifty times last year.

The man had been badly beaten, and Greg was able to deduce almost immediately that he had died from massive head trauma. Honestly, anyone could have figured that out for themselves, the guy had two gashes in the back of his head that were deep enough to expose two large cracks in his skull. His body was covered in blood from head to toe. There was one streak of red that started at the base of his neck and extended halfway down his legs. His chest had been speckled with the blood that had leaked from the corpse's mouth and nose, along with the open wound that was open just below his neck.

Noticing that there weren't any belongings logged for the body, Greg realized that this man truly had nothing in this life. As was customary, he began to think about what this man's life had been, and how it had ended. Greg wondered if he had ever passed him on the street, begging for some loose change for food, huddled in a corner to get away from the bitter cold or the decimating heat. Maybe he had been a victim of circumstance, a leftover of corporate downsizing, which led to his divorce, and consequent bankruptcy, which pushed him to the streets. So many possibilities came to mind, every one plausible.

Greg finished the paperwork, noting the probable cause and time of death. He pulled the pasty-blue sheet over the motionless form in front of him. Greg always felt sad for these bodies, as the last light they saw was the pale, artificial light of this room. It had become customary for Greg to write a little anecdote, quote, or thought at the bottom of each report he filed. This one was no different, although it left Greg with a strong sense of remorse for the dead man in front of him. He pushed the body into its metal holding box and filed his findings in the cabinet.

The cops came to pick up the report on the homeless man later that day while Greg was on his lunch break. They would never admit it, but each officer that picked up the files on the recently deceased always looked forward to reading what Greg wrote at the bottom of the page.

This particular policeman was no different. The officer grabbed the file and skipped to the bottom.

“This man was brought to me with no worldly belongings, nothing to show for his time on this earthly plane. It’s quite sad, actually. He left this world much like he entered it, alone, naked, covered in blood.”

-Shawn Carter