

Rattle. Rattle. Rattle. Thirty-one cents; thirty-one cents rattle in a paper coffee cup as I shake them rhythmically in my unsteady hand. One quarter, a nickel, and a penny. None that were deposited however, as this change was simply my morning findings of the haphazardly discarded, but the sound garnered more attention. The cup was my good luck charm. Four years had I collected my daily earnings in this paper cup. The dried black stains reminded me of the passed passive offering of kindness. A symbol of the world's humanity, juxtaposed in the smallest of deeds. The man I had received it from had been complaining that the coffee had been poorly sweetened and also tasted slightly burnt. In deciding whether to return to the shop and receive a replacement or to bear the unbearable task of wasting his \$1.25 on a poorly constructed piece of coffee, he noticed me, and decided to relinquish his morning start-me-up to the lesser masses. It was the best cup of coffee I had ever tasted, and so I saved the cup as my rabbit's foot.

Rattle. Rattle. Rattle. Thirty-one cents. Thirty-one fucking cents. No sense at all to such little cents. It had only been the better part of two hours but I was beginning to lose what little hope I had for the day. All I wished was to make enough for a fucking pack of smokes. I might even thank the Lord Jesus for enough to buy a bottle of Jameson, but the "new city of york" was, indeed, a tough crowd. The burly man across the street in a wheelchair and what looked like a torn piece of undergarments wrapped over his eyes holding a sign that read "Might as well be invisible" could not speak more of the truth.

His name was John. At least that's what he said it was. I know him because he's a part of our club; more of a union actually. Of course, the main point of the union's inception was to map out sections of the city and designate beggars to different sections each day, but we usually give John a break on that because he's blind and can't navigate that well. At least, that's what he told us. But it doesn't matter either way because he never removes that disgusting thing from his eyes so he might as well be blind, right?

You see the whole thing started when we realized that one beggar on Wall Street could turn a decent profit for the day, but two beggars and people begin to avert their eyes. Because helping one depraved soul is an obligation to the better part of a person's humanity, but two is just a hassle. So after a couple years of seeing the same faces saunter into another's territory, and arguments over prime real estate ensuing, we decided to unionize. We first met in the alley beside Rocco's Pizza just outside Greenwich Village behind the dumpster. It was an easy location to form meetings since the back door of the pizzeria doubled as the supply line of drugs to most of the homeless around Washington Square. The owner of Rocco's didn't like this very much, however, because the congregation of the unwashed kept the "clean" people away. Not that he ever did anything about it because Carlos, the "head chef", gave him twenty percent of the cut.

Still, every now and then, Rocco would come out and yell at us, "Why do you fucking garbage people hang around here? You need to get out of here or I'm calling the police! Fucking garbage!" We didn't mind. He was just saving face for the customers. He never actually called the fuzz. Plus, now we had a name. We met there behind that dumpster, discussed and resolved a

lot of our issues, and thus we formed The Garbage People's Union. Not to be confused with the Garbage Men Union, which was later changed to the Union of Sanitation Workers because it was decided that Garbage "man" was an antiquated term. As is beggar, apparently, not that I could give a shit. They call us homeless now. Soon these fucking snowflakes will be calling us housing impaired.

To date we have eight people associated with the club. You've met John. Others include Gregory, a young homosexual from Long Island that had dreams of the Broadway theatre. The acting bug bit him early in life; the HIV bit him later. Then there's Sergeant Jim Baker, a seventy-nine year old veteran of Vietnam. The most financially stable of us all, he receives supplement checks from the government for PTSD when they find their way to him, and when his daughter doesn't spend them all on heroin. Sasha is a black street walker who's actually a dude, but we don't judge. As long as she keeps up with the application of heavy makeup and keeps her wig on straight, she actually passes for a very fine looking woman. Katharine is a real woman. I know this for a fact because she's my girlfriend. We actually have a very loving relationship as far as beggars could go, at least when she's not sucking drug dealer cock for a free bump. Ezekiel is an interesting character. Very religious as his chosen pseudonym would have you believe. If you ever see a homeless man shouting about end times around Washington Square it's probably Ezekiel. Middle aged, or at least looks that way. He claims he's Jewish but with his blonde hair and pale complexion he looks like he could have been one of Hitler's schoolboys. Henry is a crackhead. Young, black and all he talks about is getting more drugs and how he hasn't been able to get it up in years. We try to tell him that the male libido can only take so much euphoria, that it's either crack or pussy and he can't have both, but he swears he's been afflicted by the Devil. But out of all of them, Veronica is the one that really has a few screws loose. Her and Katharine used to have a relationship until Katharine met me and decided the fish didn't compare to the meat, at which point a couple months ensued where Veronica would try to mutilate my manhood with a variety of sharpened objects. Since then we've somewhat reconciled, but that doesn't stop Veronica from trying to steal Katharine back. Sometimes quite literally. And then there's me. My name is Samuel Watson, and I want to be a writer. I say want because unlike most of the club, I have a dream that I cannot easily discard. Gregory and I have bonded over that. Together we make up The Garbage People's Union. Our goals are to daily make enough for smokes, booze, and drugs, and eventually find a way to get out of New York. Our dream is to make it to Los Angeles, where we can be housing impaired and warm.