

# LA FOLIE



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## FOREWORD

It all started when disillusionment grew and grew. So far that one picked up a pen and flew. READ THE BOOK. Inspiration lay in dreams and thought, yet it was unimaginable what daily life had brought. READ THE BOOK. People walking streets, spouting words of ordinary opinions and greets. Yet not one spoke of the other, except when they found themselves bothered. READ THE BOOK. Faces and stories and city life was what I observed, gave them names and let them be heard. No ordinary civilian life, but a battle within a man, filled with pain and strife. READ THE BOOK. So here follows the story of Tino, larger than life with no rhyme worthy enough to make up for his misunderstood character. If you were to meet him some day, you would undoubtedly give him a repulsive look. Yet I hope you will respond differently after reading this book. Go ahead now, reader, responder, self-selected judge of morality... and read the book.

## Chapter I

### Tino Picks up a Pen

Here we are... at last. It took them a good four weeks to get me a pen to write with... I came to them with the request of merely a book and a pen. A book costs them too much, apparently, and they already stated that I am a man with expensive needs as I own a record player and one particular record... so I slid a notebook into my bag when no one was looking in the store. I doubt they'll ever question its fons et origo. I believe they even forgot the reason why I kept pushing for this pen...

If I were to tell you my story face to face, it would take me thrice as long, which is why I shall write it down in this book. You might be wondering why. Perhaps you're coming up with all kinds of reasons why. Stuttering, shyness, ADHD... did I guess right? You didn't if I did.

I am Tino and I have Tourette's syndrome. That surprise package I was given at age 15 included coprolalia, which means I unintentionally say words I do not necessarily mean. People I cross outside view me as a man who seems to be angry forevermore. I see my condition as a curse that prevents me from social contact. That makes me aggrieved. Aggrieved, disappointed, and mournful.

No, I am not "constantly angry," as many complete strangers seem to be convinced of. They seem to think they know all

about you after encountering you once or twice during their busy lives. One emotion in one moment is, apparently, enough to judge a human unknown to you. I am not regretful for keeping those people at a certain distance.

However, I would consider myself “angry” for a sum of other reasons. All that floats around me, for instance... plastic people, soulless and rushed buildings, so strong yet on the verge of collapsing because of bombs that are patiently waiting to be dropped on such a city as New York. I can see it all happening before my unsurprised, somewhat cynical eyes when I walk these streets in broad daylight. The rifles firing, the horrific screams of children, the bloody terror.

These are not hallucinations, though I’m sure many would like to believe so. I see them as visions, like the Natives of old used to practice. Insights, ignored by all kinds of strange creatures with missing eyes. Few of them awake at some point in their life. They find themselves in utter dissatisfaction, or disillusionment, and may even rebel for something to improve instead of yet another invention labeled “progress” that really aims to suppress and destroy.

However, as humane and fair those intentions may be, one might lack the motivation. One might find it non-beneficial, futile, or perhaps even idiotic once one grows older and once one has grown out of it. In the last stage, one surrenders, and gives up the fight, the struggle, the strife, the freedom, the life... and everything goes back to as it was before. Thus, the

war rages on. Not against the trap he finds himself in, but rather the futile wars and massacres he condemned not so long ago. The ones he now refuses to acknowledge. All because one felt alone and downtrodden in the struggle to the point where failure lay not in an inefficient conclusion, but the capitulation of one's morals. The deal where supposed security and safety is traded for the soul's true character. The deal with the Devil.

That's what I make of city life around me. Negative altercations are no rarities for me. For instance, a few months ago, a man of authority showed no mercy when I inadvertently cursed at an old lady in a parking lot. I was just walking to the store when she approached me. I was minding my own thoughts, facing the ground as ever. Usually, when I see someone approach me, I make time to prepare myself for them. Sometimes, strangers ask the way. Even though I know the answer to their questions, I get nervous quickly. When I get nervous, I start tapping the side of my thigh at a rapid pace, and curse at people. I have met every response you could imagine. Some do the same to me in return, others want to start a fight. I walk away, to which they laugh. Children laugh at me as well. Sometimes they pick on me, mocking me with faces and taunts. I try to ignore them. Police officers tell me they'll arrest me for being intoxicated in public, store workers threaten to give me a shopping ban, and yuppies will yell "do you know who I am!"

This time was quite different. This time, I had no time to prepare myself, for a lady snuck up behind me. She came from a spot near the store's entrance, where she was posted with a fellow elderly woman near a rack of magazines titled "Will There Be War Forever?" The other woman was talking with a young man. "Hello, sir!" she rushed toward me, aggressively tapping me on the shoulder. "Hello!" again. I turned around, still with my hands in my jacket's pockets but with my eyes closed, trying to focus on remaining quiet and polite. To my surprise, I hadn't yet spoken any vulgar words. This time, the vulgar words had come to me.

"Do you happen to be the man who's been insulting good, honest people around town?" she asked me. Now I opened my eyes, giving her a good look. She was smartly dressed in gray and black, wearing a long skirt and a peacoat. She must have been around 60. Gray hair, wrinkles, and a demanding, strict face. I have been described as surly, but this woman certainly bested me. I continued looking at her, facing down a bit as a consequence of her height, not sure of what to say. A few moments later, she continued, but with a touch of stuttering. "W-Well, you should know..." she tried to say, now avoiding eye contact, "...that... one day, you shall be judged for every single word you have ever said to others" she finally put together and nodded swiftly. Only that last sentence sounded somewhat assured.

I wanted to walk away from her, but after seeing a magazine being acquired by the young man and the words underneath it

reading “JW.org,” it felt like my duty to do what I saw as right. “Your God is responsible for my unintended actions. For my uncensored, vile words, as is he responsible for what I am telling you right now,” I said to her, not feeling even slightly anxious. I doubt whether she comprehended what I said, but she certainly understood the next word.

“...mmm-mmm....mmmm-moron!” I shouted out of the blue. She was shocked by what I had said. I was not. Being upset about things I say is something I gave up a long time ago. I used to feel bad about ruining someone’s joyful mood or teaching children bad words. At the end of the day, however, they’re going to judge you, no matter what...

The woman had yelled something I couldn’t have cared less for, so I marched on to the store to obtain the dailies. Over at the home, they give me roughly \$13 every day. It’s enough to keep me hydrated and fed, but sometimes, I’m forced to ask strangers for a quarter or two so I have enough for a pack of cigarettes. At times, I also check a few trash bins to save a bit of money. Saving up is hardly worth a try around here, though...

In the store, I am usually competent at remaining calm. That is because it has become a part of my daily routine. In the very beginning of doing “normal” things, I struggle with them until they aren’t new anymore. Greeting the cashier used to be the hardest part of it. Social contact. This time, along with the last six times, everything went properly.

However, that great feeling of confidence never lasts long; As I walked out of the store, having already forgotten about the incident from 15 minutes earlier, the same lady from before approached me once again. Same as before, I did not have any time to get ready for yet another argument, since she struck me the same way from behind. “There he is, right there,” I could hear her say as swift footsteps were nearing on the concrete. It wasn’t just the lady this time, though. She brought a big, grumpy police officer along. “Sir, please stop right there so we can discuss this,” he said demandingly. I turned around and saw the lady taking cover behind the long arm of the law, pointing at me as if I was a monster that had to be captured. I closed my eyes as I did before, trying to remain calm. “Did you happen to offend this lady here?” the cop questioned me. “Not just me!” the lady added dramatically. I tried to explain the situation to them, but the lady rudely interrupted me after every word I attempted to say.

I have a strange automatic reaction to police officers. Sometimes, I quietly call them things that would get me jailed if I would say them out loud. In general, their uniforms make me feel uneasy. Seeing their nightsticks, handcuffs, weapons... It frightens me. It frightens me that a man is given such dangerous power so very easily. It’s not only police officers that disturb me. Army people do so many times more. I think that if I were to ever meet the president, one of us would not make it out alive.

“What do you have to say, sir?” the cop asked me impatiently. A few people around us found a thrill in watching the dispute unfold. Seeing all those eyes set on me, waiting for my response... How could I not lose it? And so, there I went again...

Everyone surrounding us watched how I yelled profanities into both the officer's and the religious lady's face. People took out their cellphones to film it. I tried to walk off, but the whole crowd followed me, as did the cop. “You're not going anywhere but jail, boy,” I heard him say. Right as the cop tried to grab me, I heard a female voice in the near distance. “Stop that!” she interfered, and rushed into the crowd to get near me. “Stop it, officer, he's got a condition!” she repeated. Seeing her face, I knew I was lucky. Who knows what could have happened if she hadn't showed up? The officer asked who she was. “I'm his coach,” she answered. “Coach?” the officer asked, confused, “what do you mean ‘coach’?” “He's not well. He lives at the facility, I'm his coach.” she explained. “Oh.” the cop answered, not sure of what to say anymore. “Well, uh... you get on with your day then.” He said, then instructing everyone surrounding the area to mind their own business.

The facility is where I live. Perhaps “living” is not the correct word for such a place when you know what it's like to truly live. “Exist” may be the better word. I remember living. Living was before the facility. Before Raison. Before I had to make a choice. It began when my family first noticed my disorder.

They never did like me much. I was a late accident and I was different. I was rebellious... and so, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. They found a reason.

On a cold Christmas night during a family dinner at my aunt's and uncle's, my family decided it was time to discuss the obstacle in the road; me. My uncle was lying on his death bed as we (my mother, father, aunt and cousin of 6) were eating turkey downstairs. He was dying of cancer. At some point during dessert, I was instructed to say goodbye to my uncle. We would all do so, one after the other, and I was up first. I was a sad young boy of 16. My uncle and I had a real bond. One my father was jealous of all the time. My uncle would tell me all about his adventures from long ago. Sadly, he was too ill to speak, but he gave me a note the rest of the family wasn't allowed to see. He was the only one I trusted, so I followed his advice. What did my uncle write in that letter? For now, it is safe to say that my family wished to... 'correct' me.

As we drove home that night, with the windshield covered in snow and the vagrants struggling to keep warm on the sidewalks, it was time for me to think as hard as I could. As if my life depended on it...

## Chapter II

### Hobo's Lullaby

At the young age of 17, I myself had made one to change the course of my future. A plan any provoked teenager creates when he finds himself in distress and mad at the world, though I was one of the few to push it through. I had no other choice. It was either fleeing home or being silenced.

I remember it like it was yesterday. One night after Christmas Eve. Rivers were freezing and snow fell from the sky into the faces of homeless people. Nobody would deliberately exit their homes that night. Nobody who could stay at home and feel safe near a fireplace. That wouldn't be me. I would be spending the night in a place where no one would come looking for me. A place where no one would be expecting me to be.

It was precisely 3 a.m. I had been preparing for the clock to stem its mood to the hour of the witch. With a duffel bag on my shoulder and my warmest clothes on my body, I sneaked downstairs, carrying my shoes in my hands to avoid making loud noises. The only tic that was bothering me at the time was tapping my thigh, luckily. I had two jeans on, three pairs of socks and three layers of clothes on my torso. Downstairs, I quietly grabbed the warmest wool cap there was and then proceeded to grab a decent supply of food. Just when I was about to exit through the front door, something came to mind. A useful fact that would come in quite handy. I recalled

my father putting a weekly sum of money in a box. \$650 were to be found there. I took it without hesitation.

Out the door I walked. The front door to a child's home that used to feel like a warm entrance to youthful luxury, but turned out to be the gates out of hell, with its absolute dictators lurking inside. A place where escape was not merely a burning desire, but the inevitable outcome that would change my life's path.

There I went, drifting through the cold streets of New York City, trying to find the cheapest place to stay. I wasn't all that frightened. Everything I saw... the vagrants, the gangsters, the dealers, the crooked cops... I walked straight past them. Every moment I was living in now... it was all spare time. I could have been as good as dead. I should have been. That's what would have happened if I let everything slide on by. If I would never have been convinced that, sometimes, life lies in your own hands. Let things come your way, but never let fate roll over you. And never let the cruelty of New York's harsh winters bury your body in snow.

I kept walking, street after street, beggar after beggar. I wasn't looking for anything fancy to stay in. I didn't need a bed with 99 pillows and a scented mattress. That would keep me awake more than it would put me to sleep, considering the expenses. If there is one thing I have always longed for, it's simplicity. This city, just like the next, is the residence of so many buildings, each trying to top the clouds. So many

people, trying to blend into crowds. I always dreamed of rambling around the countryside where bison run the plains and eagles fly in the clean, clear sky. I admire the Native Americans who spent their lives in such a way. How they used to live before the Europeans decided to bring civilization to them, stealing their land and homes in uncivilized ways. When the power hungry man meets resistance, he will approve murder and genocide. All his actions were justified by a gun in one hand and a book in the other. A dirty deed seen as good by those who enjoy his reign in wealth and prosperity, ignoring all those who have died from greedy expansion, factories, industries, train tracks...

My uncle used to tell me all about these kinds of topics when I was younger. He was what you'd call a freewheeling hobo. He drifted from town to town, from state to state, sneaking into boxcars and hitchhiking across the country. Every town brought something new, he told me. New kinds of people, a new woman, a new tune for his harmonica, a new friend he'd have to say farewell to. He tried to avoid the South, though, but when there was no other warm place to go to...

I would listen to Uncle Mack for hours. He was similar to me. Forever the angry appearing man with a whole bunch of stories to tell... but to whom? A book, I suppose. Unfortunately, he never wrote one. Not that I know of, at least. If he did, Aunt Jenny probably hid it away somewhere. Uncle Mack has always been negative and critical concerning Aunt Jenny. His version of the story tells that they met in a

dusty little town where he passed through. She was working in the local church. "I arrived there with a group of comrades in a Beetle," he narrated, "We stayed at a motel and spent the night there. Then, all of a sudden, I woke up with the most horrific pain you could imagine!" he told me, an attentive listener of 8 years old. "My comrade, the driver, had stabbed me in my chest and took off," he told me dramatically, as he would show a big scar. "Then, just in time," he continued, "in walked a formally dressed young lady who heard my screaming. She saved me, got the town doctor to fix me up. Apparently, he was her father." Then, the mood simmered. "I passed out into a deep sleep I wouldn't wake up from for I don't know how long..." he told me tragically, "All I remember ever doing after that is going to the hospital when you were born, Tino... that's all I remember. I don't even remember yesterday..." After these stories, he'd sing Woody Guthrie's "Hobo's Lullaby," playing his harmonica along with it as I would fall asleep.

I didn't know what to make of it back then, but I have come to believe that what they did to Uncle Mack... is what they intended for me as well. Poor man...

As I was thinking back on these conversations, my eyes caught a blue neon sign that read "VACANCY." The light on the letter V was flickering, like someone trying to stay awake but slowly falling asleep nonetheless. I decided to take a look inside.

I opened the creaky door and saw a man behind the counter, eating a donut while smoking a cigarette. I was under the impression that doing so inside a building was illegal, but that was the last thing that went through my mind. I approached him, walking past a bunch of lockers first. Only three of them were closed, which didn't surprise me. The man was busy watching football on the television next to him. He seemed focused, not laughing or showing any form of emotion. It almost seemed as if he even tried his best not to blink, or else he'd miss a pivotal moment in the game.

Once I was less than 2 feet away, I said, "Goodnight, sir. Do you have any vacancies?" He did not reply. I witnessed the bright colors of the TV cover his concentrated eyes. He must have thought he was the football coach himself or something like that. "Sir?" I asked, wishing to warm myself up after a long night. "Whataya want, kid?" he asked me with a grumpy tone. "I was wondering if you have any rooms left." I answered, shivering occasionally as my body recovered from outside's temperature. "Sure, kid," he finally responded as he took the last bite of his sprinkled pink donut. That piece covered his entire mouth, and when I asked, "What'll it cost?" he replied incomprehensibly. "What?" I questioned, leaning forward for a better understanding. "20 DOLLARS!" he yelled into my ear, "What, are ya deaf?" While my right hand tapped my thigh, I gave him a 20 dollar bill with my left. "Room 13, make yourself comfortable, kid. Just clean up your mess on the bed, I don't want no bedbugs to crawl because of you kids,

you hear?” he asked me, still fixed on the TV set. “Yes, sir,” I answered, and grabbed the keys he granted me.

The hotel was quiet as I walked down the hall. There were rooms on each side. I began counting after walking past 7. 9, 11... 13. I used the key to open the door, which required a bit of forceful manoeuvring. I slowly opened it after it said “click,” gazing inside as I tried to demolish all expectations inside my head. It didn’t appear that awful. I stepped inside and closed the door behind me. On the left was a toilet, which seemed clean enough. In the right corner stood a small bed for one person. Nothing to complain about there. To its left was a nightdrawer, and in the left corner of the room stood a chair and a small wooden cabinet. I put my bag down onto the chair and sat down on the bed, perhaps a bit too hard. I heard the wood creaking. The mattress surely made up for the cheap price, and as for the smell... I tried to turn that off as soon as possible.

I turned off the light almost immediately after taking in the room’s furniture and, to my surprise, fell asleep instantly when I softly whispered that old Guthrie tune to myself. I truly wish I could tell you about some kind of symbolic dream I would have had, but the truth is, I do not recall ever having a dream. I hear people talking about them as if they represent the ultimate spiritual guidance or explanation for their lives... I reckon my life must be such a chaos, even the spirits don’t have a clue what to make of it.

I woke up the next morning when the Sun was long past his breakfast. I certainly was craving for one, so I packed my things and walked out of the room. Walking down the hall once again, I realized just how fast time was going. My mother used to tell me that time flies when you're having fun. Well, where does it fly to? The next moment? Why would it want to fly there if the present is that fun?

When I arrived back at the reception area, the man from last night was still sitting in the exact same spot, but he had fallen asleep with the TV still on. The TV was playing something that seemed to be a 1940s opera concert. I guess football can't be played forever. Especially when it loses its sole coach to drowsiness. I didn't want to wake him, so I just left the keys on the counter and walked out, back onto the streets.

New York City was as busy as ever. People quarreling over taxi rides, yuppies running red lights, pedestrians bumping into each other. I no longer paid much attention to any of that planned-out, scheduled life. I just wanted to live in the now instead of imagining how I could mess up the next moment in school, on the street, with my parents and so on. What I did want to know, however, was where I could eat some decent breakfast, so I decided to walk eastward a bit to find a place to fill the stomach.

When I finally found an available table in a decent diner, it was full of people working on their laptops and doing something related to their jobs. Not one couple was to be

seen. On the radio, a song called 'Drivin' on 9' could be heard. It felt like I knew that song... Still, I couldn't place it. Listening with one ear, I sat down, thinking of what to do next after eating. However, I am not much of a thinker when hungry, so it was only after eating when I simply decided that I would just keep checking into cheap hotels every day until my money ran out.

I met all sorts of odd receptionists during a 5-week cycle of checking in, sleeping on a halfway bed, checking out, walking through town in the cold and eating an omelet for breakfast and fast food for dinner, then checking into the next place. I also needed new clothes sooner than expected, so yes, after 5 weeks, the bottom of my wallet was in sight. In spite of that, I did not give up. I didn't think about going back for more than a second. Still, the days during which I would be living on the streets came closer and closer as I began counting... only \$50. I had no idea how to prepare myself for it. I had nothing to keep myself warm with except a bunch of worn out clothes. What would I eat? What would I drink? How would I shower? How would I survive that winter?

More important than any of these concerns, I felt alone. Never, in all my life, had I experienced such loneliness. Not even in school, where most of the children either ignored or picked on me. Even there, I knew what true, friendly company meant. That was all gone. If I was lucky, I had a TV with poor signal in some hotels. I had no one to call with, no one to visit. When I tried making a conversation with someone

working in a diner, they would leave my table after a minute because they were obliged to return to impatient, technological customers who demanded a refill of their Black Ivory coffee. If the employees did have some spare time, I would usually be the one to mismanage the situation due to my condition. With these daily disasters, I never spoke with somebody about topics that went beyond “how is your day going.”

So no, I wasn’t outside much. I usually spent my days at the library, but got banned from there one day. I was minding my own business, reading something about a nuclear power station somewhere near the city. I was so concentrated on the text that I hadn’t noticed a librarian woman next to me. “We’ll be closing soon, young man!” she said, which sounded very loud to someone with his mind in a book. You know me by now. I was startled and got anxious. Inevitably, I began to swear into the lady’s face, and tried to silence myself by pushing my hand against my mouth. She already made up her mind and threw me out permanently. I went back to my hotel and remained there for what seemed to be forever... until the very last night arrived.

The last restless hotel night flew by like the nights before. My back was giving up on me. I could really have used a Thai massage, that is one thing I am certain of. After that night, I began drifting around the city during the day, walking toward the southern part as the Sun began to set. I was hungry, but I forced myself to “grow a smaller stomach.”

After walking for hours and hours, my feet hurting and tired, I finally saw some light in the dark night. It was revealed to be a burning barrel when I closed in, located below an overpass. Around it sat a group, gathered together in a circle, trying to stay warm. Behind them were a number of tents. I approached the group, not fearing them or whatsoever. I needed to warm up. With every step, I began to see their faces clearer and clearer. The man on the left was old... really old. He was seated in a wheelchair. He had a long gray beard, wore big glasses and a trucker's cap. In his hand, he held a cigar that was at its near-end. He seemed to be staring at the fire infinitely.

I stepped closer. Next to the old man sat a skinny woman on the ground. She was smiling, and her front teeth appeared broken. Her face was wrinkled. In her hands, she held a cup, which I reckoned was filled with coffee. She was holding onto it to keep warm. To her right sat a younger man. He seemed rather tired. Dark blue bags filled the space under his eyes. His eyes were slowly closing. He was holding a joint between his index and middle-finger, which he had almost finished. He was wearing a gray hoodie. The hood, he wore over his head. He was sitting in a garden chair. They all sat in garden chairs. To the right of him sat a black man. He had a slight facial stubble, a worn outfit, and held a bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag in his hand. He was telling a story to the rest.

When I analyzed all four of them, I was close enough to hear what the black man was talking about. "It was all fun and games until that moment, man, I'm tellin' ya," he spoke to the rest, who didn't seem to be showing much interest. "Hey, who's that?" the younger man asked the rest when he saw me closing in. "Yeah, who are you?" the black man questioned me. He seemed confused. I suppose they weren't expecting any visitors at this hour. Or, perhaps, at any hour. "Hi," I said to them, "I, uhh... I'm Tino," I answered. I had everyone's attention, except for the old man's. He continued to stare into the flames. "Well, Tino..." the black man said, "What the hell is a guy of your age doin' 'round here at this time? Ain't you s'posed to be in bed or somethin'?" he asked me, and he was right. "I, uhh..." I wondered whether I should tell these strangers the truth, a lie, or a bit of both. "I don't have a bed... anymore," I answered. "You don't have a bed, huh?" the same man said. "Well, guess what?" he asked. "What?" "We don't either!" he laughed noisily. The rest solely smiled, but not the old man. He was still fixed on the fire rushing into the air. "You wanna sit down?" the black man asked. Of course I did. All I could have asked for was some company and warmth... and maybe a crumb of food. I didn't answer. Instead, I walked toward one of the open seats, of which there were two.

A short silence followed. I believe all of us had to take a moment to realize that what was happening was so very different from the moment before. This group whom I barely met now, suddenly, had a stranger among them. An

introduction would be at its place, I figured. "I'm Tino," I said. "Hello, Tino, how you doin'?" the black man humorously asked me, and shook my hand. "That over there is Theodore. He don't talk much," he told me as he pointed to the old man. "Actually, he don't talk at all," he rephrased. "Next to him sits the lovely Patty. She does talk. A lot," he continued as he pointed to the woman, who gave him an irritated look, and proceeded to shake her head. "That there is Jerry, he's a little zoned out right now as you can see." I looked at Jerry, and saw he was finished with his joint as he threw it onto the ground and extinguished it with his shoe. Without even having a moment to process why, I suddenly got nervous. Before I knew it, I started spouting curse words. To Patty, to Theodore, to Jerry, to the man who hadn't yet revealed his name to me, to the dying joint on the floor who provided yet another high, to the empty chair I expected somebody to fill at some point, to the chair I was filling and thinking whether I rudely took someone's place... and most of all, to myself; the freak who could not stay normal for one moment and wrecked a chance to meet people for the so-manieth time. I blew it before I knew his name, I thought, for the entire group gave me perplexed facial expressions.

And so, after a full minute of non-stop swearing, I stood up and wanted to walk away. But they stopped me. "Whoa, whoa, whoa now, not so fast!" the black man said, and raised his hand. I grew even more anxious. Why did he want to stop me? Was he going to punish me for my vulgar language? I froze. "Wait a minute, man, wait a minute," he ordered. "You got,

uhh... you got something, don't you?" he queried. I was in no position to answer. "You got uhh..." he tried to say, snapping his fingers to help his thinking, "Tourone's Syndrome, right?!" he guessed, "That's it, right?" The rest didn't seem to know what he meant. I, on the other hand, had never felt so enlightened to hear someone guess nearly-right. Every once in a while, that happened; someone I would come across who actually recognized my disorder. When I meet these people, I feel like I owe them something for their compassion and recognition. I fell quiet, for this man was one of the first people to know about my disorder. For me, that is a great thing to occur; falling silent. It means I am assured... and calm. "Yes," I answered, "y-yes, I do." He smiled at me, and the rest seemed a little less worried. "Sit down, man," he said, "I'm Jim."

### Chapter III

#### Vacancy in Vagrancy

“So, how did you figure?” I asked Jim after my lips were finally warm enough to speak comfortably. “Figure what, kid?” he asked in return. “About my condition,” I answered. “Well, my cousin had the same thing. One day, he decided to take speed to help him cope with the world and his sick- uhh... disorder,” Jim respectfully explained. “For a while, it helped... until it didn’t. Until he couldn’t do without it no more...” “What happened?” I asked him, willing to know about people like me. “He OD’d on the damn stuff... poor bastard,” he answered with a somber look in his eyes. “I’m sorry,” I told him regretfully. “That’s alright,” he replied, but it wasn’t quite that way. “Nothing to do about it now... he’s in a better place,” Jim stated as he took another sip of his vodka.

“So, where are you from, anyway?” Patty curiously asked me after a minute. I noticed that she was missing quite a lot of her teeth. “Around,” I answered, not really in the mood to talk about my past. “Ain’t we all?” Jim stated. “Do you have a name then, traveller?” Patty continued to question me, to which I answered: “Tino.” She looked at me rather confused. “Tino?” Patty asked, “I have never heard someone named ‘Tino,’” she said. “As a matter of fact, neither have I,” I said to her. “It’s a nice name,” Jerry said. Those were the first words he ever said to me. I thanked him.

After denying a sip of Jim's bottle, I asked the group what the old man's story was. Patty explained that Mr. Theodore used to be a sailor, allegedly. At one point in his career, just months before he was allowed to retire, he fell off a large freight ship and onto the docks from quite a height. That turning point in his life paralyzed him for the rest of his life. He had nothing to fall back on. No family, no fortune, no family fortune. He became homeless and begged his way around. Patty, who had just been evicted back then, took care of Theodore in return for a little company. He shared all of his stories with her and they became bonded.

However, as Patty went away for a few hours to find food after it began to run out, a group of robbers took advantage of her absence. They took Theodore's most valued possession; his gold pocket watch. Not only did they rob him, but they beat him with metal objects as well, taking his speech along with most of his comprehension. That would be Theodore's last tale. Not told with excitement and thrill, but written down in the rain on a soaked piece of paper with terror in his eyes.

Afraid that the gang would strike again, Patty and Theodore took off and found their way to the overpass. Months later, Jerry arrived there as well. His parents no longer wanted him around and prohibited him from ever coming home again. They viewed him as a failure they could no longer face. He moved to his grandmother, but she unfortunately passed away a year later. He then decided to live with a friend. However, he couldn't bear the dependence and guilt for living

with others. He never felt wanted after his grandmother passed away. “Every host wants the whole place for themselves eventually,” he was convinced of, “Even God.” “How so, Jerry?” Jim asked him. Jim was a man who believed in God, but rejected the church. “He’s gonna throw everyone into the deepest depths of Hell when the Day of Judgment arrives,” Jerry answered atheistically, “Then, He’ll have both Heaven and Earth all for himself.” Of course, Jim didn’t quite agree with Jerry, but he refused to try and convince a non-believing young man. He respected his choices and beliefs.

What Jim did do, however, was making sure Jerry never thought of himself as an actual failure. Whenever Jerry would consider himself what his parents labeled him, Jim would tell him: “Come on, Jerry, don’t think that way. You’ve got other great qualities. I mean... who the hell do I know can do the things you do with math, man? That’s some sorcery-level type shit,” he would say to lighten Jerry’s low self-esteem. “The fact that this damned society takes quantity over quality ain’t your fault!” Jerry would lean forward and look Jim in the eye, saying: “Yet I continue to suffer from it every single day in this stinking place.” Jim would do the same thing and lean forward as well, responding: “All of us do, my friend. You can trust me on that.”

Jim has always been the one who cared the least about being homeless. I myself had always been indifferent about it. Jerry, on the other hand, was regretful about his life choices most of

the time. He was constantly putting himself down by looking back on family arguments, poor grades and inconsistent jobs. The only time he was able to give it a rest was during a high, which seemed to require more and more puffs every night. Patty never shared a word about the absence of four walls and a roof. She didn't seem to care about it all that much. Her backstory remains a mystery to me. It went unnoticed that she never told us anything about it, since all the tales that came out of her mouth were Theodore's. Jim did most of the speaking within the group. I recall his backstory very well.

"I come from a big household," he began, "but not one of unity and compassion, no sir. The one of strictness and church-goin'. It never suited me none. Singin' in the choir, havin' religious talks, all of that... conventionality. Don't hear me wrong, I certainly do believe in the Great Creator... but I'm sure the way we're living on this planet wasn't his plan by any means. Maybe he grew more and more confused over time, seeing all different kinds of forms of himself as they unfolded through the ages," Jim spoke like a disillusioned prophet. "The way I see it, He's still in here," he assured as he laid his hand on his heart. "We just lost the idea up here," he added, pointing his finger to his head.

I agreed with Jim to some extent. If there's one thing the world needs right this minute, it is unity. Not the millionth ancient dividing partisan idea that only one group *can* and *will* be right, no matter how many lives are taken to have such the party's point proven. People do not think for themselves.