

Homeless

by S.H. Gall

I was in Boston, drinking blueberry tea and vodka on a Friday night, and had this idea. I would take the train to Providence, RI, where a friend of mine from the interwebs lived.

Having done so, I awoke the next morning in a dewy cemetery lawn on the outskirts of Providence, with not a cent to my name. I walked into town. I lay on a table in a gazebo by a river as the sun warmed. Cadged a glass of water from a coffee shop and walked the long hill into town, to Brown University and the Avon Theater, where my friend worked as a projectionist.

And my friend had gone from Providence to Boston to visit his girl for the day. Fate, or fate?

The campus of Brown — the college my mother was attending when she married her first husband — was dismaying. A commercial drag, pierced by offshoots of narrow streets, tidy manses with saplings on the strip of front lawn. Penniless and scared, I puked on all the saplings, the radiant yellow of my bile in delicious contrast to the sullen gray sky.

My friend returned from Boston, well-laid, late that first afternoon. Virtually penniless himself, he availed himself of a cup of tea for the both of us. He couldn't put me up — roommates would have objected — he knew I was a bit of a mooch and a cad and a drunk and a sly bastard from our online interactions. He suggested a shelter, something offered by Travelers' Aid. A couple of friends of his, a lesbian couple, showed up for a screening on his watch, and they gave me five dollars.

I bought a half pint of vodka and strode back down into the empty heart of the city, a patchwork of voided lots, butchered cars, mounds

of trash and guarded couples veering into rare pools of streetlight. At Travelers' Aid, they gave the queue of us donated pizza. Dilapidated re-purposed school buses, now civilian blue, ferried us from the city into a compound abutting a state prison. In one huge room, Latino gang members chased each other through the bunk rows, high on street speed, shouting and brandishing knives while I sought sleep.

The next day found me back on the commercial drag, huddled on the bottom step of an underground storefront which had gone out of business. Keeping the vomit-bile off my shoes was my sole concern. That night, it was back to the shelter, but a different barracks. These were single beds. I slept in my shoes, eyes half-closed. It was pouring rain when we were herded back into the re-purposed school buses. I sat on the lap of a fat blonde. Everyone was sitting on someone's lap.

In the Brown bookstore, I shoplifted a paperback in my back pocket, and a number of pens and pencils. Dismayed at not being caught and sent to a warm cell, I hunkered down in a fiction section armchair. I read James Purdy. When a man sat next to me, a black man holding a technology journal, I broke down crying and, describing my situation, collected eleven dollars.

Having bought a half pint of vodka, I got myself a slice of pizza and a Coke, which I drank with the vodka. I spent the remainder of the money on another half pint. That night, I found myself trying to sleep on a wooden bench in the bus station. Next thing I knew, I'd had a seizure.

Woke up with a splitting headache in the Emergency Room, unable to report my date of birth. Having gotten myself properly medicated, I left the hospital with fare for the train to Boston.

Three days later I was found with an empty bottle of wine on the doorstep. I was taken to a detox, where the entire cycle began again. Homeless, barred from human contact, alone and aloof.

Seth Gall has had work published in China, Canada, and the U.S. His work has appeared in Word Riot, SmokeLong Quarterly, and Nanoism. He is S.H. Gall in decomp Magazine, Nanoism, issues one and 27 of SmokeLong Quarterly, Five Star Literary Stories, and Fictionaut.

